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Microtargeting via Facebook and its impacts on federal state elections in Hamburg

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Master in International Studies

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Resumo

O caso da Cambridge Analytica em 2018 mostrou como a era digital e as novas possibilidades resultantes do marketing comercial afectam as campanhas políticas. Apesar das preocupações, observamos hoje que os serviços de publicidade no Facebook estão a crescer e que o microtargeting político chegou à Europa. Uma vez que a investigação neste contexto ainda é escassa, esta tese visa analisar como a publicidade num canal específico dos meios de comunicação social poderia ter impacto numa eleição regional alemã. Utilizando a Análise do Discurso Crítico (CDA), foram estudados anúncios políticos no Facebook durante um período de dois meses antes das eleições estaduais federais em Hamburgo, em 2020. A análise do conteúdo e do discurso estava de acordo com o argumento de Roemmele e Gibson (2020) de que a forma "subversiva" de microtargeting é muito aparente e mina as potenciais consequências positivas de visar anúncios políticos (p. 595). Embora induzindo emoções negativas como o medo e sentimentos de insegurança física e social, as propagandas direccionadas mostraram atitudes sexistas e anti-idade, assim como encorajaram a identidade local e a xenofobia. Essencialmente, a tese argumenta que o microtargeting encoraja a desigualdade digital, contribui para uma cultura de voto que é emocional e ideologicamente motivada e pode acelerar a polarização da sociedade. Acima de tudo, a grande parte do discurso que visa convencer os eleitores em vez de os informar, leva à suposição de que o microtargeting é uma ferramenta que serve para ganhar potenciais eleitores aos níveis de informação mais baixos possíveis.

Palavras-chave: microtargeting (Político) , Redes sociais, Facebook, Eleições, Campanhas políticas, Hamburgo

Abstract

The case of Cambridge Analytica in 2018 showed how the digital age and the resulting new possibilities for commercial marketing affect political campaigning. Despite concerns, today we observe that Facebook ad services are growing and political microtargeting has arrived in Europe. Since research in this context is still rare, this thesis aimed to analyze how advertising on a specific social media channel could impact a regional German election. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), political advertisements on Facebook during a two-month period before the federal state election in Hamburg in 2020 were studied. Content and discourse analysis were in line with Roemmele's and Gibson's (2020) argument that the "subversive" form of microtargeting is very apparent and undermining the potential positive consequences of targeting political advertisements (p. 595). While inducing negative emotions such as fear and feelings of physical and social insecurity, targeted advertisements showed sexist and ageist attitudes, as well as they encouraged local identity and xenophobia. Essentially, the thesis argues that microtargeting encourages digital inequality, contributes to a voting culture which is emotionally and ideologically motivated, and may accelerate the polarization in society. Above all, the large share of discourse aiming to convince voters rather than to inform them, leads to the assumption, that microtargeting is a tool that serves to win potential voters at lowest possible information levels.

Keywords: (Political) microtargeting, Social media, Facebook, Elections, Political campaigning, Hamburg

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Glossary of acronyms

AFD	-	Alternative for Germany; German: Alternative für Deutschland
API	-	Application programming interface
CDA	-	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDU	-	Christian Democratic Union; German: Christlich-Demokratische Union
CSU	-	Christian Social Union; German: Christlich-Soziale Union
CSV	-	Comma-separated values
EU	-	European Union
FDP	-	Free Democratic Party; German: Freie Demokratische Partei
GDPR	-	EU General Data Protection Regulation
INSM	-	New Social Market Initiative Economy Initiative; German: Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft; German
MP	-	Member of Parliament
PDS	-	Party of Democratic Socialism; German: Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus
RStV	-	National Broadcasting Treaty; German: Rundfunkstaatsvertrag
SED	-	Socialist Unity Party; German: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SPD	-	Social Democratic Party of Germany; German: Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
UK	-	United Kingdom
US	-	United States
WASG	-	Electoral Alternative Labor and Social Justice; German: Wahlalternative Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit

1   Introduction

Three months before the national elections in Germany the lobby organization *INSM Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft* or *New Social Market Economy Initiative* has run an advertising campaign across several large German newspapers showing the chancellor candidate of the Greens Annalena Baerbock in a Moses robe holding two stone tablets with ten commandments. Besides being accused of serving antisemitic and antifeminist stereotypes, framing the Greens as the others the campaign has been heavily debated in public (Bidder, 2021; Kappeler, 2021; Koß, 2021). This is just one example of how openly lobby organizations try to influence the result of elections and how impactful advertisements can be (Stoecker, 2021). Although with a way smaller budget, the same campaign has been run by the *INSM* on Facebook on the 11th of June for just one day reaching about 120.000 impressions, which represents just one among many examples of how social media channels are increasingly used in electoral processes. Especially, the very well-known scandal of *Cambridge Analytica* in 2018 showed how the digital age and the resulting new possibilities for commercial marketing affect political campaigning. Although, the company was punished for their misuse of personal data, the practice itself continues as the whistle-blower and former employee at *Cambridge Analytica* Brittany Kayser recently said in an interview (Heuberger, 2020).

One of the most known theories, when describing the changes in society's communication in the digital era is Castells' (1996) theory of a *network society*, which describes the newly composed society as a result of networks, which is merely individualized and dissociated due to technological progress and the resulting possibility to connect with each other everywhere and at any time. This new society is a product of "major social, technological, economic and cultural transformations" (Castells, 2000, p. 17). Politics are shaped by the social communication which is taking place in public and the shift towards the network society ultimately shapes the political process, since "political opinions, and political behavior, are formed in the space of communication" (Castells & Cardoso, 2005, p. 14). But shared information in this network is made up of interpreted messages of other users, which develops to be a flow of ever-increasing autonomous information. Moreover, the increased role information has in the new era is outside the scope of national regulation and thus imposes great power to the ones who control those networks. The theory is addressing the increasing importance of networks, especially social networks, gained throughout the digital era, which makes the surroundings adopt and organize around it, with processes of production, experience, power, and culture adopting to the new conditions. This represents a significant change from earlier network revolutions and the quick expansion changes the entire social structure, which is a helpful concept to understand the increased role of social media also within political campaigns (Castells, 1996; Costa et al., 2019).

Microtargeting is one practice campaigning companies like *Cambridge Analytica* but also parties' marketers use. It involves targeting users based on their digital footprints and is subject to many public debates (Bayer, 2020; Borgesius et al., 2018; Dobber et al., 2019; Harker, 2020). However, three years after the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal we still see revenues for *Google* and *Facebook* ad services growing also from the segment of political *microtargeting*. It shows the practice is starting to be established across Europe and its parties at several levels (Hegelich & Medina Serrano, 2019). Although political advertising and campaigning belong to the electoral process and are nothing new, the specific practice of microtargeting might differ from the former political marketing tools, since the *Artificial Intelligence* used by online giants such as *Facebook* and *Google*, tends to feed their users with the content they prefer and might be more effective compared to earlier practices in political marketing. At least the original practice as in commercial targeting is said to be very effective in targeting the right consumers and thus increases the revenue of the advertising companies (Matz et al., 2017).

But these platforms and their activities, leave a gap between *democratic values* such as *free speech* and liberal business interests, regulating flows of information according to their needs rather than to societal values, and thus call for new approaches in safeguarding democracies in the digital era (De Gregorio, 2020). On the other hand, a legal limitation would ultimately regulate the discourse from another side and touch another central value to democracies: the *freedom of political expression* (Bayer, 2020; Harker, 2020). The problem for the practice of microtargeting lies in the fact, that it is even harder to measure its effectiveness, since voting procedures are anonymous. While the campaigning tool is accompanied by substantial risks for voters, candidates, parties and the public, solid and valid data is still rare and therefore regulations will hardly be found (Borgesius et al., 2018; Harker, 2020). Furthermore, microtargeting enables marketers to exclude or neglect certain groups from information, which may result in negative consequences for the voter turnout (Barocas, 2012; Bayer, 2020; Dobber et al., 2019; Harker, 2020).

To contribute to a more detailed understanding of microtargeting via social media and its potential consequences for public discourse and ultimately elections, this thesis will investigate how microtargeting was used during the electoral campaign by German parties on Facebook drawing on the *Hamburg federal state elections in 2020* as a concrete case. Based on *Robert Jauss' (1970) reception theory*, using the *Fairclough's (1993)* framework of *critical discourse analysis*, this thesis tries to reveal weather microtargeting has an impact on public discourse in the case of Hamburg.

Since European case studies on microtargeting are still rare, this research contributes to the scientific literature about microtargeting by analyzing concrete data of political discourse on Facebook in the German context. Furthermore, this specific methodological approach enables other researchers in Europe to investigate the limited data that is publicly available in

a way that contributes to a more detailed understanding of how microtargeting is practiced in Europe, and to understand in what way it might affect democratic discourse and thus elections.

1.1 Research question

We depart from a research question reflecting how a specific social media channel could impact a regional German election: *Did microtargeting on Facebook impact in the Hamburg federal elections?* To answer this research question, the thesis will arise two sub questions: *(1) To what extend do parties' use microtargeting on Facebook? (2) What discursive strategies did the parties use during the electoral campaign on Facebook?*

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The thesis will be structured as follows: After the introductory part (1), the concept of microtargeting deployed in this thesis will be introduced (1.3). As a next step, the academic literature about microtargeting will be reviewed (chapter 2) to provide an overview of the current state of the art. It will acknowledge the increasing role of data in contemporary political campaigns (2.1) as well as include a sub-chapter about the more general practice of targeting messages and the implying effects (2.2). In addition, the potential consequences of microtargeting will be introduced for three different actors involved (2.3): the public, political parties as well as individual citizens.

The next chapter (3) will introduce the theoretical basement of the thesis which is provided by *Robert Jauss' (1970) reception theory* (3.1) and then introduce the methodological framework which has been used to analyze the data set (3.2). For this thesis a combination of *discourse analysis* and *content analysis* has been used, which has then been further embedded in *Fairclough's (1993) three-level model of critical discourse analysis*. Chapter four will then provide more detailed information about the case study, including background information about regional differences in microtargeting (4.1), specific information about the German party system (4.2), microtargeting in Germany more generally (4.3) and the federal state elections in Hamburg more specifically (4.4). Furthermore, this chapter will also provide information about Facebook as the chosen platform to analyze (4.5) as well as more detailed information about the data set (4.6).

Chapter five will be designated towards the analysis of the data set; the findings and their discussion and the last chapter will conclude this thesis (6). Information about the used bibliography can be found in part seven of this thesis as well as more detailed information about data gathering can be found in the appendix.

1.3 Concept of Microtargeting

In order to assess the effects of microtargeting on a specific social media channel, it is helpful to first specify more precisely what microtargeting means in the context of this thesis.

While early attempts of strategic gathering of voter information originate in the 1950s, when opinion polls became popular, microtargeting, experienced a comeback as part of door-to-door canvassing and involves gathering data of voters as well as their voter-segmentation based on various characteristics, including "geographic, demographic and previous voting behaviour" with the goal to coordinate contents accordingly (Harker, 2020, p. 170; Kruschinski & Haller, 2017, p. 4). As of Kruschinski's and Haller's (2017) "micro-targeting is a commercial direct marketing practice and refers to the process of making strategic decisions at the individual level about which customer to target with what campaign message" (p. 3). They further understand it as a strategic tool, "which is geared towards addressing persuadable or mobilizable voters with tailor-made messages while ignoring others" (Kruschinski & Haller, 2017, p. 3). The underlying procedures are originally of commercial nature and used to increase purchases often implying components that use psychological attributes to reach these goals. In commercial advertising advertisements are designed to reach higher levels of persuasiveness. For example, users

> "with high openness to new experiences would be exposed to an ad that focuses on novel features of a product, while a person with low openness to experience would be shown an ad that highlights the long tradition and classic features of a product" (Winter et al., 2021, p. 1).

Based on the above mentioned strategies, microtargeting in this thesis is concerned with its online use which developed to be a combination between "data-driven voter research" and "personalised political advertising" (Borgesius et al., 2018, p. 82). More detailed and in line with Dobber et. al (2019) this thesis understands the practice as "online political micro-targeting, or micro-targeting for short" which is comprised of "three steps: 1) collecting personal data, 2) using those data to identify groups of people that are likely susceptible to a certain message, and 3) sending tailored online messages" (p. 29). The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the influence of *microtargeting* and its use in form of online political advertisements. Referring to Bayer (2020), political advertisements are understood as all advertisements:

> "which are directly intended for the voters, with political content which may either directly or indirectly inform the voter about a political party's or candidate's opinion, plans or policy; which may invite voters to events and actions, promote causes or incite various emotions" (p.1).

Throughout this thesis, the term microtargeting will refer to this concept of online targeted political advertisements, aiming to either inform or have persuasive effects on voters, targeted based on gathered data of the party as well as distributed through the advertising algorithm of the chosen social media channel.

2 Literature review

In order to evaluate whether the above established concept of microtargeting on a specific social media channel potentially impacts a regional election in Germany, one needs to understand how communication on social media and in political campaigning generally changes as well as who the different stakeholders involved in that process are. Thus, this chapter serves to review the current state of the academic literature, which will further enable a profound understanding of microtargeting, its consequences and how these are connected to the individual citizen as well as to the public discourse.

2.1 The role of data in contemporary political campaigning

As Roemmele and Gibson (2020) argue, political campaigning is in the *"fourth phase"* of using big data (p. 595). This new phase is marked by four changes: 1) Increased dependency on data and technology, 2) "networked communication" as well as 3) microtargeting and 4) a trend towards international political campaigns (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020, p. 595). Furthermore, this phase is divided into two different versions which seem to operate contradictorily, one being the *"scientific"* representing techniques to enhance mobilization and the spread of information and the other one being *"the subversive",* undermining these goals (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020, p. 595). The researchers describe this development to be in line with the *"Americanization"* of campaigning which is marked by more localized campaign approaches and communicated as acts of modernization and professionalization of campaigns through enhanced "use of external consultants, micro-targeted advertising, computerized databases, and an emphasis on marketing research to better package and 'design' party messages" (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020, p. 596). Moreover, these developments are accompanied by an increased role of campaigns for parties during the electoral process as well as a growing centralization within the organizational structures of parties on a national level (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020, p. 596).

A similar thought is taken by Kusche (2020), who analyses the relationship between *datafication in political campaigning* and the historical concept of *political clientelism*. She points out, although political clientelism is often seen as "deficient", there are significant similarities with data-driven campaigns (Kusche, 2020, p. 1). Based on Foucault's (1977) theory on *datafication and surveillance*, Kusche (2020) identifies major challenges for democracy. She states that, compared to earlier understandings of surveillance, today "nobody is exempt and the value of the surplus of information is distinctly economic" (Kusche, 2020, p. 5; Zuboff, 2019). Kusche (2020) argues that the adoption of commercial marketing in political campaigns, especially "data-mining and microtargeting", "are elements of relationship

marketing, "which represents an inviting practice to reach voter groups, that have not been reached before", concluding that *datafication* in campaigning and *political clientelism* have positive and negative implications for the electorate (p.10).

2.2 The practice of targeting messages in the digital era

The practice of microtargeting and its research on effects in voting behavior is still comparably young and thus rare. Sending targeted messages to advertise is, however, often practiced in commercial areas, following the intension to change *consumer behavior* and increase sales of products or services in a specific market segment. Especially, during the last years the strategic attempt to target messages to groups or individuals has raised awareness in other fields, such as health communication and climate action (Hirsh et al., 2012; Noar et al., 2009; Pangbourne et al., 2020). In these areas the practice of tailoring messages to specific audiences appears to be a promising approach, since it can have persuasive effects and thus induce behavioral change (Noar et al., 2009). "A glance at any persuasion volume reveals that the persuasiveness of a message involves factors including its source, receiver, channel, content, and contextual characteristics", but although creating a persuasive message is extremely complex, the existence of a chance seems to increase its usage within many areas (Noar et al., 2009, p. 73). Today, "audience segmentation and message targeting" are widely used in communication strategies, since it promises effectiveness as well as similar, and in best case positive, reaction among members of the defined target group (Noar et al., 2009, p. 74). Within all areas of message targeting, groups are divided by various behavioral and demographic characteristics, with demographics being the most commonly used method (Noar et al., 2009; Slater, 1996) Furthermore, factors like "message preferences, channel preferences, and issues related to campaign execution" can be considered (Hornik & Ramirez, 2006; Noar et al., 2009, p. 75).

However, this strategic approach to enhance campaign effectiveness "relies entirely on identifying group similarities and subsequently targeting messages at the group level" leaving individualistic characteristics aside, which lead to the appearance of tailoring more individualistic messages (Kreuter et al., 2000; Noar et al., 2009, p. 75). In Noar et al. (2009) understanding, algorithms that align messages with an individuals' interests and preferences, can thus convert targeted messages into tailored ones if they are connected to "large empirical databases … created for this purpose", which are today provided by computer technologies being able to match messages with individuals (p.76). The assessment of the necessary data is today provided by our digital footprints and the Internet has developed to be a channel in which one can reach the masses and simultaneously use "the persuasive properties of interpersonal communication (Cassell et al., 1998; Noar et al., 2009, p. 78). For example,

sending targeted short messages to stimulate positive short-term behavioral changes has been studied in the context of preventive health measures like smoking cessation as well as with diabetes patients managing their disease themselves(Kreuter & Wray, 2003, p. 227).

Another study showed how effectively tailored messages can be used to increase "walking as form of transportation", by using persuasive appeals based on demographic and psychological data in mobile apps, finding that targeting messages according to age, personality and values increases their persuasiveness (Pangbourne et al., 2020, p. 311). They pointed out that gathering user data about personal characteristics enables to tailor messages accordingly and thereby bring about the desired behavioral change (Pangbourne et al., 2020). In this study, the researchers found that no special argumentation type is outstandingly persuasive, while especially the "arguments ad populum" appealing at the "social proof" of something, may have controversial affects (Orji et al., 2015; Pangbourne et al., 2020, p. 311). Furthermore, age contributed significantly to values, which in turn appeared to be determining the response-behavior and is thus important to increase persuasiveness of messages. They conclude that:

> "Apps which can make use of data on their users' personality traits and age (either inferred from tracked behavior, or else explicitly acquired via questionnaire) will be in an excellent position to tailor arguments by type and value in order to present the message most likely to succeed for any given user" (Pangbourne et al., 2020, p. 311).

By investigating the relationship between a message and its recipient selling a single product, it was found that messages which appear to point out gains or losses for the consumer and aligned with their individual motivational orientation are processed faster and leave a positive impact (Hirsh et al., 2012). Another conclusion was that tailored messages become more effective the higher the customization level is in line with a user's characteristics (Dijkstra, 2008; Hirsh et al., 2012). Furthermore, personal information can be used to create psychological profiles that enable targeting and can thus contribute to increased sales. In this realm, they further mention that freely available information like Facebook profiles, e-mail addresses as well as how an individual language use, can be used to infer about a person's personality (Hirsh et al., 2012). While the study is clearly addressed to analyze these effects on commercial targeting they researchers point out that research is needed to evaluate the generalizability within other areas, also mentioning political campaigns (Hirsh et al., 2012). Despite the potential effectiveness of sending persuasive tailored messages to individuals in the above-mentioned areas, this is often argued to have limited effects in political campaigns, meaning that in this area it cannot change the attitude towards someone or a party but it can help to help mobilize those who are already convinced (Vaccari, 2013).

While also finding support for these arguments, Vaccari (2013) further found that the success of persuasion by sending tailored political messages within a campaign depends on an individual's level of political awareness as well as message intensity as additional variables

to consider. While on one hand, those being most politically aware are reached the most, they are unlikely to accept these messages, those that are politically unaware are easier to convince but harder to reach on the other hand (Vaccari, 2013). The study concluded that those who are moderately informed are exposed the most to persuasion by a political campaign, since they can be reached as well as show tendencies towards a messages' acceptance (Vaccari, 2013). Furthermore, the study pointed out that political campaigners found "themselves close to the goal of reaching large numbers of voters who are at least somewhat likely to accept their messages" (Vaccari, 2013, p. 123). The acknowledgment of this persuasive component signals an alignment between digital and mass media, which they describe to be also mirrored in the increased usage of digital media.

2.3 Microtargeting and its potential consequences

Borgesius et al. (2018) investigated microtargeting more generally, analyzing the implying advantages and disadvantages resulting from the practice, concluding that the strategy could help to enhance participation in elections and political interest especially among people who cannot be reached using other channels that easily (see table 1). On the other hand, they presented threats like a potential competitive advantage due to funding differences within the landscape of parties, the enhanced influence of online marketing companies, potentially resulting in consequences for public discourse as well as public opinion (Borgesius et al., 2018).

	Promises	Threats
Citizens	More relevant political advertising Reaching social groups that are difficult to contact	Invading Privacy Manipulating voters Excluding voter groups
Political Parties	Cheap (some types of microtargeting) Efficient Effective	Expensive (some types of microtargeting) More power for commercial intermediaries
Public Opinion	Campaign diversification More knowledge among voters about individually relevant issues	Lack of transparency regarding politicians' priorities Fragmentation of the market place of ideas

Table 1: Promises and threats of microtargeting (Borgesius et al., 2018, p.92)

Furthermore, while targeted advertising is expected to enhance efficiency of parties to attract voters and can also increase political participation, it comes with the risk of turning the online dialogue into issue-based politics, addressing the voters by the personalized issues and thus violate their data privacies (Borgesius et al., 2018). The following section will deepen their three-level analysis by presenting the current state of scientific research on each level: public opinion, political parties as well as citizens.

2.3.1 Ramifications for public discourse

On the level of public discourse, microtargeting is described to be enhancing the possibility of running more diverse campaigns enabling to reach more voters and encourage them to participate in democracy while at the same time giving them the opportunity to make their voting decision on the basis of more information (Borgesius et al., 2018). This is especially relevant, since microtargeting generally enables to communicate more political issues due to its individual nature, which may draw the attention from some key issues traditionally discussed in other mass-media channels (Borgesius et al., 2018). Although, microtargeting also poses strong risks to public society, since its increased usage can potentially contribute to a lack of political transparency regarding individual politicians' priorities as well as it could lead to a strongly fragmented political landscape (Borgesius et al., 2018).

Especially the possible consequences for public opinion are strongly debated among the academic literature about microtargeting. One aspect discussed in the literature is that microtargeting can potentially increase political participation, but could also cause chilling effects, meaning that citizens will change their behavior, if they feel observed (Barocas, 2012; Dobber et al., 2019; Harker, 2020; Kusche, 2020). There are not many studies, that show relationships between microtargeting and political participation, though the argument can be observed from other mass-media channels such as television, for example. Freedman et al. (2004) find that political advertising, in television, can enhance political participation by informing and engaging the electorate. Analyzing data from the US election in 2000, they conclude that citizens exposed to campaigns are more interested in the elections and can recognize the candidates, which increases their likeliness to vote (Freedman et al., 2004). In their study, voters who were the least informed showed the strongest effects (Freedman et al., 2004). Though, the difference here is that television advertising is broadly available and thus viewed by the public which controls unethical content. Kusche (2020) though argues, that microtargeting has the ability to mobilize voters, but observation is central to the concept of microtargeting, which is likely to impact voters especially if they are already or become aware of this observation. This is also mentioned by Barocas (2012) who states that, if digital campaigning strategies are kept a secret chilling effects might increase, which encourages to build dark campaigns.

Furthermore, microtargeting is said to increase political fragmentation, spread misinformation and likely to play with ideological and group differences or issue-based politics (Barocas, 2012; Bayer, 2020; Borgesius et al., 2018; Gorton, 2016; Harker, 2020; Kreiss, 2017; Kusche, 2020; Lee, 2020). "Fragmentation happens when the public loses track of overarching themes, and instead focuses on the single issues that are relevant to them personally, which are the topics delivered through micro-targeting techniques" (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 4). As

Kusche (2020) argues, it can prevent voters to see themselves as part of a "collective with common interests" and the practice may enhance a populist rhetoric (p.10). Based on the same observation, Lee (2020) examines the relationship of social media usage in politics and the levels of voter involvement, the influence on decision-making and the perception of users. The study finds that voters social media usage positively affects those determinants, especially when communication and marketing is designed toward the "users' feel of belongings in a certain online community and their perceived effort, when using a certain social network site" (Lee, 2020, p. 1).

Moreover, microtargeting could induce unclear party campaigns and a division of political discourse due to targeting different messages to voters (Borgesius et al., 2018). This argument is also taken by Harker (2020) who states, that microtargeting can undermine the public democratic discourse by the possibilities of sending contradictory messages to different users and addressing users' "prejudices and biases", which has the potential to increase fragmentation (p.152).

Similarly, Barocas (2012) explored that the practice of microtargeting, direct mailing, and its ethical and political implications finding that it enables wedge-issue politics or single-issue politics which provokes unclear candidate profiles. He points out that microtargeting by nature enables candidate to send contradictory messages to different target groups. In the case of issues, this increases the chance to mobilize voters through *"wedge issues",* especially by addressing topics that would polarize in a more public setting (Barocas, 2012, p. 33). This has been validated for the campaign of the 2004 presidential elections in the US, during which candidates were touching more polarizing topics in targeted campaigning, in this case direct mail, than in broader audience media (Barocas, 2012).

In this sense, Kreiss (2017) argues, that microtargeting is just an effect of the root cause, which is a democracy "that prizes partisan mobilization, group solidarity, agonism, and the clash of opposing moral views in its politics "(p.1). He suggests that it is rather a cultural change that needs to happen, otherwise the practice has the long-term power to impact the trust in the democratic process (Kreiss, 2017). Furthermore, Kreiss (2017) describes the voter according to Achen's and Bartels' (2016) theory understanding an American voter as seeing himself as part of a group, seeking for identity, with preferences in policies, rationally choosing the candidates who are the closest to their views, which can also impact their interpretation of facts. Campaigns are accordingly designed to mobilize voters to support their social groups by voting and can show more effectively how the candidate is linked to the social group they identify with (Achen & Bartels, 2016; Kreiss, 2017). He points out that, microtargeting strategies are much more likely to strategically construct social and group identities, than sending opposing promises to different target groups (Kreiss, 2017). The practice allows to point out differences between the overall values of the parties, especially cultural differences,

with the advertiser representing candidates with the right moral view and the opponents as being *"anti-civil"* (Alexander, 2010; Kreiss, 2017, p. 6). As a result, of this campaign ethics, voters will receive less information and be more confronted with social values and "mobilization ads are directed towards identity-congruent audiences" (Kreiss, 2017, p. 7). He believes, that "there is such democratic anxiety about micro-targeting because citizens are supposed to be independent, autonomous, and rational", but the practice increases conflicts among opposing social and political values, which is a reality of democracy (Achen & Bartels, 2016; Kreiss, 2017, p. 10). The reason why people do not like this sort of conflicts is that they rather want a leader ruling in their own interest, than someone being truly democratic, willing to compromise among opposing views (Kreiss, 2017).

Another factor posing a risk to public opinion and strongly debated within the academic literature is transparency (Borgesius et al., 2018; Dobber et al., 2019; Harker, 2020). Harker (2020) points out that approaches enhancing transparency within these processes, should always be preferred over regulations, but they need to be effective. He introduces different possible regulations to enhance transparency: 1) labelling of ads to enable users to judge the credibility displayed contents and improve online repositories, 2) regulations to enforce reports about online political campaigning from the party's side, including regulations preventing foreign interference during campaigning periods and 3) to set rules and limit the contents of political ads (Harker, 2020). While especially substantive restrictions need to be addressed very carefully, since they can impact the political discourse, they should not be disregarded (Harker, 2020).

However, he also points out that the industry is showing the will to comply with the norms of electoral law and thus increase transparency, though their success depends on "the credibility of threats to intervene with sanctions, and even direct regulation, should industry led initiatives fail" (Harker, 2020, p. 170). Thus, the European Commission has made its first attempts to regulate microtargeting, introducing a "self-regulatory code", the *Code of Practice*, agreed by Facebook, Google and Twitter, which intends to enhance transparency regarding microtargeting (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 12; EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, 2018). Although, Dobber et al. (2019) point out, that the main regulations must be taken on national level within electoral and campaigning laws. The European Commission though, recommended to its member states to enhance campaign transparency including "any targeting criteria" (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 12). Based upon this agreement, Facebook introduced new verifying procedures for campaign advertisers, who then needed to complete an authorization process as soon as they were publishing ad touching topics about political or social issues (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 12). While, at first, the process of uploading those advertisements was then limited to one single country, there were made exceptions for the EU institutions, shortly after, but there is no transparency who else can run European wide ads

(Dobber et al., 2019). Moreover, the current level of transparency is very limited since ad libraries still do not provide full insights on how users are targeted and the criteria of categorization for political ads vary among companies and the identification process of ad buyers leaves options to escape (Dobber et al., 2019; Leerssen et al., 2019). Dobber et al. (2019) raise the question, if the EU should stick to its self-regulatory approach, when considering the implications for democratic processes further pointing out that there is a tension between the EU regulation and the national states, when talking about microtargeting, since "electoral regulation involves a particularly complex balancing of interests, and is tied to national culture and political history "(p.13). Although lately, even some companies start to regulate the practice, since public harm stands against their "commercial benefits" (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 14).

Above all, a recent investigation of these measures concluded that, so far, social media providers did not fulfil their commitments, since libraries are often not functioning or not including enough transparency-enhancing parameters, which is way below their technical capacities (European Partnership for Democracy, 2020). Comparing the platforms efforts when trying to regulate misinformation about the Covid-19 pandemic they conclude that on the company side there is "a lack of commitment, regulation and sanctions", while the regulation, definitions and guidance is not sufficient from the regulatory viewpoint of the *Code of Practice* (European Partnership for Democracy, 2020, p. 27). Moreover, this report emphasizes that platforms fail to takedown ads and verify advertisers in time, if not in line with their own policies, which benefits untransparent marketing strategies. The largest paradox considering the electoral focus, seems to be the fact that parties are limited in targeting large groups and audiences with different political views, since these ads were more expensive and additionally "discouraged by the ad-delivery algorithm" (European Partnership for Democracy, 2020, p. 28). These points led the researchers of the report conclude that the existing lack of commitment among social media companies violates democratic principles and should thus be regulated externally rather than internally (European Partnership for Democracy, 2020). They propose five companied approaches to enhance digital political communication and advertising: First, a co-regulatory framework, which sets the rules for transparency, accountability, and the needed mechanisms. Second, an improvement of libraries for all dominant platforms, for political as well as commercial ads. Third, a European definition of what is a political ad, which will enable filtering the library by all political ads and enforces the providers to identify the advertisers. Fourth, a European platform regulator, which will act as an external control organ to ensure, providers meet the requirements and having access to the original databases. And fifth, enhanced cooperation between national regulators and the European platform regulator, to ensure same transparency on a nation level (European Partnership for Democracy, 2020).

A factor that has not been mentioned by Borgesius et al. (2018) but is also a key component within the debate about implications for public opinion are the resulting information asymmetries and the role of free speech. While the practice might be useful to confront users with opposing views than their own or challenge their voting traditions by exposing them to other parties' statements, another consequence of the increased use of microtargeting in political campaigns are the information asymmetries it can cause (Bayer, 2020; Borgesius et al., 2018; Harker, 2020; Kolany-raiser & Radtke, 2018). The innovations behind these processes are hard to regulate, which ultimately increase the risks and costs to fail regarding potential regulatory approaches (Harker, 2020). Furthermore, a law restrictive to political communication needs to be safeguarding the *European Human Right of the freedom of expression*, which was protecting for example political advertising on television, electoral leaflets and posters, under this law (Borgesius et al., 2018; Dobber et al., 2019).

Dobber et al. (2019) investigate the right to freedom of expression: *Article 11 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights* (The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000). This law is concerned with several actors, when analyzing microtargeting:

> "candidate's freedom of expression …, a political party's freedom of expression ..., an online platform's freedom of expression …, and, indeed, the public's (voters') right to receive information …" (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 7).

While the researchers point out, that there is no court decision at the European Court of Human Rights for microtargeting yet, they mention several similar court decisions concluding that microtargeting will most likely be considered as another form of paid political advertising, which is in line with the freedom of political expression (Dobber et al., 2019).

On the other hand, DeGregorio (2020), addresses these information asymmetries investigating the practice of content moderation by Social Media platforms, finding that these are touching freedom of expression. This paper is adding another layer to the debate by arguing that the algorithms of Social Media companies are governing the informational flow, while not being "accountable nor responsible" for the results and simultaneously setting the rules upon which contents are filtered, without providing transparency about them (De Gregorio, 2020, p. 1). He argues that the informational flow is organized by economic and not sociological interests, which cannot be classified as *free speech*. DeGregorio (2020) further states, that at first glance social media channels empower *free speech*, while at the same time regulating it through moderation, which implies to define "the standard of protection of fundamental rights in the digital environment" (p.3). Moreover, DeGregorio (2020) claims, that the current practice of content moderation, with all its non-transparency, displays a problem for democratic societies, because their rights are controlled by non-published algorithmic decision-making processes. Earlier, the liberal approach to safeguard *free speech* online was appropriate to ensure democratic values, but today the moderation of content changed this

legitimacy and turned to be "authoritative" forcing users to comply with the rules each company defines individually (De Gregorio, 2020, p. 16).

In this realm, Bayer (2020) states that microtargeting, can violate both sides of the human right *"freedom of expression and the right to access to information"* pointing out the potential damages for democracy (p.3). She further argues that "the protection of political expression is rock solid, as it should be in all democracies", but microtargeting is also violating "the right to receive information" (Bayer, 2020, p. 4). This is based on the idea that freedom of expression is a democratic value, which includes are "free discussion of public issues" including diverse ideas originating from many different outlets and reaching all audiences (Bayer, 2020, p. 4; Sadurski, 2014). This is an essential element of a free democratic discourse, which again is "indispensable for voters to exercise their electoral rights in a representative democracy" (Baker et al., 2008; Barendt, 2005; Bayer, 2020, p. 4). The essence of *free speech* can thus be understood as the right "for citizens to receive all information which may affect their choices in the process of collective decision-making and, in particular, in the voting process" (Bayer, 2020, p. 3; Meiklejohn, 2001). Bayer (2020) concludes that the threat to democratic public discourse justifies a "complete prohibition" of microtargeting, but also points out that due to high interests of many stakeholders, the practice is more likely to be continued (p.10). Moreover, she concludes that "whenever the Court had to balance between the public interest of the community and the interest of an individual, the public interest has been considered with substantial weight" (Bayer, 2020, p. 11). By introducing court decisions about political advertising, she states that among all cases "the Court assessed the right to political expression and to receive information versus the protection of the public discourse, where the latter was considered as the authorities' responsibility to prevent the democratic debate from being distorted" (Bayer, 2020, p. 11).

Adding another layer to this debate, Harker (2020) emphasizes, that microtargeting is a new practice, with a still unproven outcome and calls for a "cautious and unemotional" debate about possibly needed limitations (p.170). Though, he also emphasizes the need for balancing potential risks against proven damages, before taking concrete regulatory steps, which leads him to question, if those risks can justify regulations, since regulations will necessarily impact the public discourse too (Harker, 2020). Strict regulations should be the last step to take and transparency enhancing approaches, especially regarding the more unwanted consequences will always be among the first steps, though he points out that: "The risk to democratic discourse is sufficient to justify restrictions on microtargeting, as a last resort" (Harker, 2020, p. 171). Although, he also acknowledges the problem, that future governments will not be motivated to restrict these tools, if they proof successful or are still promising for their campaigns (Harker, 2020).

Based on these observations De Gregorio (2020) questions whether these asymmetries between users, platforms and states and the liberal way to tackle them, show significant weaknesses in the safeguarding *free speech* in the era of algorithms. "The expression 'liberal democracy' evokes values and principles such as liberty, equality, transparency and accountability", which might be contradictory to liberal business interests but need to be protected in order to be a democratic system enjoying *pluralism* (De Gregorio, 2020, p. 3).

2.3.2 Implications for political parties

Also, in case of political parties, microtargeting is said to have positive and negative implications (Borgesius et al., 2018). On the positive side of potential consequences microtargeting appears to be a cost-efficient marketing practice, which potentially reduces costs and enables higher reach simultaneously, which would in turn make political campaigns more effective for political parties. On the other hand, microtargeting, depending on the chosen channels, can also be very expensive, which can potentially increase the financial asymmetries between parties. Furthermore, the increased usage of digital intermediaries also enhances their power (Borgesius et al., 2018).

Especially, compared to traditional media outlets social media channels can represent a marketing tool providing lower entry barriers, either for parties entering the political competition or for parties to gain size, also showing a potential first-mover effect (Borgesius et al., 2018). Furthermore, the practice enables small parties to focus on promising constituents by adjusting and customizing campaign strategies to specifically reach out to their potential voters in case of parties formed to address the needs of very specific groups like farmers or pensioners (Borgesius et al., 2018).

Microtargeting is said to pose two main risks on parties: financial and power asymmetries (Borgesius et al., 2018). "Power differentials and knowledge asymmetries" will rise with the increased role of online political microtargeting, which will reveal and pressure the funding differences and eventually impact the electoral competition, also resulting in an increased power for marketing companies over the campaigning process (Borgesius et al., 2018; Dobber et al., 2019; Dommett & Temple, 2018; Harker, 2020; Kusche, 2020, p. 10). As a result, parties will become more dependent on digital intermediaries and these will profit from the personal data available, which leads to change in party structures (Dobber et al., 2019; Dommett & Temple, 2018; Harker, 2020). Furthermore, the almost monopolistic structure of some social media platforms can potentially result in new gate-keeping positions, which can then not only in terms of costs but also in terms of regulations increase the exertion of influence (Borgesius et al., 2018).

In this realm, Dommett and Temple (2018) investigated the role of Facebook advertising during the UK 2017 elections, finding that it was a major component, and that the adoption of digital technologies transforms party structures and campaign strategies. Though, pointing out that Facebook adverting has still a comparably small role and is just one of many practices within the field of political campaigning (Dommett & Temple, 2018). In case of financial differences data in the UK showed that, in the same election, some parties in constituents were not able to afford Facebook Ads to the same extend as other parties did, showing the importance of money when entering the Social Media advertising space impacting the competition within elections (Dommett & Temple, 2018).

In line with this observation, White and Boatwright (2020) examine the Facebook business model, which is primarily driven by selling algorithms to target individual users, and their implications for stakeholders, calling for more ethical concerns, especially when using Facebook for public relations. Contrarily to traditional media Facebook, does not sell the space it sells the technology behind the space enabling to micro target users, which is used by many different entities and still often unregulated (White & Boatwright, 2020). The researchers point out, how difficult it is to understand Facebooks practice and how easy on the other hand to use it for communication, but they call for critical thinking about this big data business (White & Boatwright, 2020).

Moreover, Harker (2020) states that platforms, especially Facebook, have developed services just for parties, which could in the long run serve as *"gatekeepers"* to the electorate (p.156). He emphasizes that the interest of these platforms to maintain stability in public debates is not comparable to traditional media outlets and that platforms and other intermediaries could reject to work for other parties' than those of their own views, which may impact policy regulations and party discrimination, especially in environments of untransparent politics and with weak public control (Harker, 2020; Kreiss & McGregor, 2018).

Kreiss and McGregor (2018) investigated the role the technology firms Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft, and Google, in political communication in the case of the US, finding that those are interested "to work in the political space for marketing, advertising revenue, and relationship-building in the service of lobbying efforts "(p.155). Analyzing data about the US presidential election in 2016, they argue that social media companies are taking a more active role in political campaigns, than considered in academic literature, since they provide active consulting and thus contribute to party's political campaigns (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). The researchers further raise the question how this recognized shift towards technology firms will impact future political communication, especially because of their privatized nature, the role they take in social life and thus a state's infrastructure (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). They are "dynamic, competitive, private, and commercialized" actors and "meld public utility and private power" (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018, p. 173; Plantin et al., 2016). The power of Facebook in the

US elections and the rise of fake news though is originated from campaigning practices during this election, especially due to the large investment of Trump's team which was spending 70 million US Dollar of their own campaign budgets and receiving another 250 million Euros as donations for digital campaigns (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). The researchers emphasize that to evaluate normative implications, one also needs provide a meaning of democracy and explore more theoretical implications, but already without doing this, there are visible developments how technology firms shape the political communication, being "at the center of democratic processes, yet also beholden to market forces" (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018, p. 174). Moreover, the companies present themselves as being neutral, but are in fact involved in campaigning processes and at the same time earning money with it. They furthermore argue, that while there is a "strong professional journalism ethics" in other, more traditional, news outlets there is no such a thing in the digital environment (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018, p. 174; Tufekci, 2015). While the techniques and availability generally allow also politicians to directly send messages to the voters, those also show frustrations to the changing environment and algorithmic evaluation of the content, which is not transparent and controlled by technology firms (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). They conclude by stating, that implications are always contextual and might differ across countries, due to differences in the system and culture, and these are different for the US than for other countries, but it is necessary to understand if and how these globally operating technology companies adapt to national differences (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018).

2.3.3 Resulting risks for citizens

On the citizen level threats involve data privacy as well as the risk of being manipulated, especially regarding their political participation (Borgesius et al., 2018). Moreover, a threat for citizens is to be excluded from information because one is not attractive to target, due reasons like living in a small constituency or belonging to a minority (Borgesius et al., 2018; Rogers & Nickerson, 2014). On the other hand, citizens could see more relevant advertising, by including new communication channels and groups or individuals that are hard to reach could be included into political campaigns (Borgesius et al., 2018).

One of the risks increasingly discussed is that voters could be manipulated (Dobber et al., 2019; Maweau, 2019). Investigating this potential manipulation more specifically drawing on a concrete case Maweau (2019) has argued that during the 2017 elections in Kenya there were "extensive explicit disinformation, propaganda and hate speech targeted at individuals and organizations" (p.350). This investigation further showed how social media became more important in campaigns and targeting voters is used by political campaigning companies to form a public opinion in order to gain votes (Maweau, 2019).

On the other hand, Brookman et al. (2014) conducted field experiments in the US to explore the effects of Facebook ads on voters by randomly selecting candidates who were targeted intensively and measuring the effects conducting telephone surveys in the same constituents. Results showed that those voters who were randomly targeted, were likelier to recall the candidates, but the ad did not impact their ability of recognition or a more positive evaluation of the candidates (Broockman & Green, 2014). Thus, they conclude that online advertising cannot influence the choice of vote (Broockman & Green, 2014).

More concrete studies on the influence targeting, in general, has on users, can be found in the commercial field. Matz et al. (2017) investigated persuasive marketing combined with *psychological targeting* based on users' digital footprints in the US. The researchers found that combining these strategies increased user interactions and purchases, especially when targeting "people's extraversion or openness-to- experience level resulted in up to 40% more clicks and up to 50% more purchases than their mismatching or impersonalized counterparts" (p.12714). Thus, they concluded that *psychological targeting* using persuasive methods generally enables influencing behavior (Matz et al., 2017). Furthermore, Winter et al. (2021) investigated the effects of trait-based personalization, finding that users showed increased interactions, such as recommending and forwarding, when ads were designed to personality traits as well as using persuasive strategies. In the context of commercial targeting practices, they found that extrovert users are generally positively attuned to ads. Only in the case of an "authority ad and susceptibility to authority" users showed more willingness to purchase (Winter et al., 2021, p. 10). They point out that the persuasion effects of ads are dependent on a "complex interplay of advertising quality, matching algorithms, personality traits, and characteristics of the media environment, which is needed to be further understood (Winter et al., 2021, p. 10).

Furthermore, there is much concern of a possible violation of data privacy in the debate about online political microtargeting (Dobber et al., 2019; Kolany-raiser & Radtke, 2018). Barocas (2012) explored that the practice of microtargeting, in this case direct mailing, and its ethical and political implications, finding that it enables a more skeptical electorate due to privacy harms. Dobber et al. (2019) point out that generally sensitive data about "individuals' income, education, consumer behavior, but also their inferred political leanings, sexual preferences, or religiosity" could be breached and used to micro target voters, as it has been done in the case of Cambridge Analytica (p. 4). Although, they state that microtargeting is not as easily applicable in the EU as in the US, because privacy rights play a much higher legal role, there are no regulations in the GDPR for the practice of microtargeting, while the law clearly regulates the gathering of "sensitive data ('special categories of personal data', article 9)" (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 6). Nevertheless, the EU General Data Protection Regulation

(GDPR) does not come without exceptions, especially consent mechanism, leave gaps to gather sensitive data, even if the law clearly demands an active consent (Dobber et al., 2019).

Likewise, De and Imine (2020) examine the low role of the GDPR for data companies, such as Google and Facebook and argue that the current absence of consent in data protection leads to illegal data usage on the company-side and a loss of data control on the consumer-side. Especially, if users think the law protects their data, they might process more information about them than intended (De & Imine, 2020). Pointing out that advertising is Facebook's primary business model and that users tend to give a lot more information about themselves on social media, these companies are holding a lot more data than earlier advertising companies without providing sufficient transparency (Andreou et al., 2018; De & Imine, 2020). By testing Facebook's consent mechanism with user activity data, they observe that "features such as freely given, clear affirmative action, explicit consent and informed are not fully respected" enabling Facebook to create user attributes including interests, behaviors and demographics (De & Imine, 2020, pp. 1056).

It has been found that a clear regulation of how data is allowed to be obtained, helps users to decide freely and informed, while in practice companies lack explanation of transparency mechanisms (De & Imine, 2020). Moreover, some marketers base their marketing strategies on attributes, that are correlating with categorizations such as "gender, race, beliefs and sexual orientation", which enforces discrimination (De & Imine, 2020, p. 1063; Speicher et al., 2018). They conclude that consent mechanism of Facebook, does not meet necessary criteria such as "informed, freely given, clear affirmative action and explicit consent" (De & Imine, 2020, p. 1063).

Another often-discussed consequence of microtargeting is that it enables marketers to exclude or neglect certain groups from information, which may result in negative consequences for the voter turnout (Barocas, 2012; Bayer, 2020; Dobber et al., 2019; Harker, 2020). The most known example is probably the US election in 2016, in which Hilary Clinton's team tried to enhance efficiency by concentrating swing states during their campaign, which ended in losing states that were already counted to be won (Harker, 2020; Kolany-raiser & Radtke, 2018). The usage of Big Data in electoral campaigns and the strategies adopted to gain votes using this data are said to affect the integrity of elections especially if they can still be called secret and free (Kolany-raiser & Radtke, 2018, p. 3).

Barocas (2012) for example, explored an older version of microtargeting, direct mailing, and its ethical and political implications in the US, finding that it enables more voter discrimination, a more skeptical electorate due to privacy harms. Additionally, some advertising teams were excluding voter groups by their religious attitudes (Barocas, 2012). Moreover, there are increasing differences between registered voters among constituents in the US, which leads to the problem that smaller voter groups, including minorities that have historically

been excluded from political processes, can potentially be excluded as campaign targets over longer periods again (Barocas, 2012; Dobber et al., 2019).

In case of the UK 2017 elections parties' advertisers were targeting based on demographics such as "age, post-code, religion, and gender, combined with indicators of users' interests," being able to fill messages based on interests such as "environment, foreign affairs or taxation" and concentrating on electorally important voter groups, like women older than 65 (Dommett & Temple, 2018, p. 198).

Based on this possibility, Bayer (2020) argues that microtargeting "impacts the fundamental right of the non-targeted citizens to receive information, and consequently, the democratic public discourse ", defining "the right to information…" as "…the passive side of freedom of expression" (p.1). She argues that the practice of microtargeting is not only harming the user who is targeted but also those who are not, since the information is not, which "can be regarded as a mass violation of human rights, a systemic problem which must be addressed by regulatory policy" (Bayer, 2020, p. 3).

In this realm but investigated in a commercial setting, Bol et al. (2020) investigated commercial targeting practices and their societal influence by testing the interrelation between user characteristics and content-exposure. They found that social media targeting strategies are often using gender and age-stereotyping, which are thus reinforcing those as well as the resulting inequalities and thus unfairness (Bol et al., 2020). Moreover, this focus on specific target groups, excludes other users, which can lead to *"new forms of (digital) inequality"* (Bol et al., 2020, p. 1998). The researchers point out, that the differentiation between different market segments needs to be debated and policies need to ensure autonomy for the consumer's decision-making process (Bol et al., 2020; Directive (EU) 2019/2161, 2019).

3 Theoretical framework and methodology

The following chapter serves to build a bridge between the above established literature review and actual use of microtargeting in practice, by embedding the concept of microtargeting in communication theory and defining the methodological approach to analyze the gathered data. This is necessary to build a solid foundation for the analysis of concrete data in the context of this thesis. First, the theoretical basement will be introduced and established in the context of microtargeting. It will be followed by the introduction of the methodological approach that will be used in order to evaluate the data and answer the two sub-questions of the thesis.

3.1 Hans Robert Jauss' reception theory

If being microtargeted, one is in most cases confronted with an image including a slogan and some additional ad text, further describing the party, candidate, or an issue the ad is

addressing, which induces a certain degree of interpretation and mediation by the reader. Hans *Robert Jauss' reception theory* helps to understand the reading process and the circulation of different interpretations (Wu, 2018). It was developed during the 20th century as part of the reader- and reception-oriented approach to literature but is also used in communication as well as media science and can thus serve as a framework to understand the process of reader reception not only for literature works (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970; Nünning & Nünning, 2010). Jauss is one of the founding fathers of the *"Konstanzer Schule of critics and scholars",* which served as base for the success of many interdisciplinary scientists from the fields of humanities as well as social sciences. It also represents a starting point of involving an analysis of structural and historical effects when understanding literary works, which went beyond the former more linear approach to the comprehension of a given meaning (Nünning & Nünning, 2010, p. 72; Weinberg, 1979, p. 358). The *"concept of the horizon of expectations"* has been borrowed for in the field of sociology already by Karl Mannheim (1958), who intended to use it as a bridge "between literary-historical and sociological research" as well as Karl R. Popper "who anchors the scholarly forming of theories in the pre-scholarly experience of life" (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970, p. 32).

More generally, Jauss (1970) is interested in understanding the sociological influence of texts, especially those with the ability to induce a *horizontal change* on the part of the reader, which also relies upon the historical context it is embedded in (Schneider, 2004). This understanding of causing a *horizontal change* to recipients makes the concept especially helpful in the context of microtargeting since also the success of political campaigns is measured by the impact they have on voters and ultimately electoral results. Furthermore, a reader's *horizon of expectation* consists of many different factors and demographic characteristics including for example the educational level and a reader's gender, which are also used in the practice of microtargeting. The *horizon of expectations* is the key component of how different readers *interpret* messages according to their former experiences. Especially, characteristics such as cultural background and demographic belonging, are contributing to the horizon of expectation, which in turn predefine how a reader perceives a certain message and if he accepts, mediates, or denies this message (Hall, 1973). Thus, a text cannot be interpreted without considering an individual, historical, and sociological perspective on it (Schneider, 2004). This approach understands "the reader response to a text is not only interpretative and generative, but also evaluative" (Wu, 2018, p. 1128).

Jauss (1970) acknowledges the reader's role as individual but also as part of a collective and his experience with a text, which enables to reveal a text's social function and will thus serve as theoretical basement of this thesis (Wu, 2018). According to Wu (2018), "the study of readership requires localizing the object of interest in a particular context, so that the readerships of this particular object can be examined accordingly" (p.1132). In the specific

context of this thesis about microtargeting, the object of interest is the microtargeted ad in the context of an electoral campaign by a party. Jauss (1970) argues that an ignorance of the audience leads to an underemphasis of the *"aesthetic character"* as well as the *"social function: its reception and impact"* of a text (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970, p. 7). He thereby argues: "In the triangle of author, work and reading public the latter is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but even history-making energy" (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970, p. 8). The triangle showing the reception process for microtargeting could be looking as in Figure 1 below.

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            advertisement        voting public
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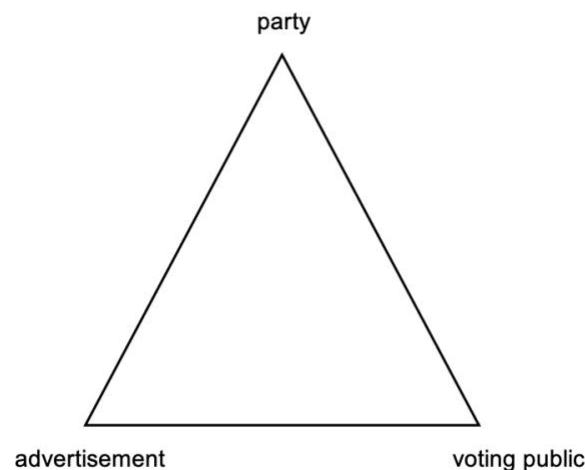
Figure 1: The communication triangle of microtargeting based on Jauss & Benzinger (1970)

Also, in political campaigns as part of elections the (voting) public has the "history-making energy", deciding whom to vote for and thus ultimately which party and also person will be in power (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970, p. 8). In the specific context of democratic elections, the voter is not only the individual citizen or in this case reader of an ad but also a part of the collective, that is determining the future power structures in a democracy. This enables the understanding of the interaction between a text and its audience as a form of dialogue, which is, in the case of ad targeting on social media, induced by the party creating the text. Thus, in the basic communication model the party can be seen as sender and the voter as receiver, while the ad represents the message to be decoded, which is the basement of Jauss (1970) reception theory as part of the hermeneutic circle, concerned with the different interpretations of a message in the broader context of the election as the upcoming *aesthetic event*. In other words, the communication process in microtargeting is comprised of parties as communication sender's and users/voters as communication receivers. Parties are trying to win voters through their advertisements in order to gain power. Voters are in this case the one necessary medium for possible power formation and gain. Thus, a reader's interpretation of a political advertisement and his expectation about a party leave room for easy convincing, filter bubbles and manipulation. If there is a gap between the horizon of expectation of a reader and the

advertisement, for example if it is very progressive, the advertisement is likely to be perceived as bad, while concepts a reader is familiar with or which are finely targeted according to demographic characteristics, are likely to be perceived as a good advertisement. According to Jauss' (1970) theory and in the context of microtargeting it would be possible, that the practice is rather contributing to a standstill or backward policy, than to progressive politics. Furthermore, Jauss' (1970) concept of perceiving familiar concepts to be good, could explain why populist parties in Germany have experienced such a strong support recently and why the Greens became popular again after the awareness for climate change has raised significantly. Although, Jauss reception theory serves as a useful theoretical framework, it does not come without limitations and critics. First, the theory is critiqued to be a literary attempt to understand primarily psychological processes consequently bringing certain limitations to its general significance (Warning, 1975). For the analysis of microtargeting this can be critiqued, since voting behavior is often argued to be a comprised of psychological processes (Campbell et al., 1960; Dalton, 1984). Moreover, one can also argue, that *Robert Jauss reception theory* is directed towards literary works and if an online political advertisement can be classified as such. Thus, it would raise the question whether it is generally appropriate to use his theory in the context of this investigation. However, therefore this would entail that a new theoretical framework for this specific form of short text would be needed to be developed, which is beyond the scope of this master thesis. Another limitation of the theory in this context represents the historical perspective Jauss (1970) reception theory takes to understand texts and their impact, which one could argue to be a key component of his theory and is fairly young in the case of online campaigning. To contradict this argument with Jauss' (1991) own words: "Certainly, it has always been in the nature of historical knowledge that experience and expectation do not come to a conclusion, that the future can never be derived from the past alone" (p.663).

3.2 Methodological framework: Critical discourse analysis

To understand how microtargeting on social media had an impact on the Hamburg federal state elections by investigating which discursive strategies were used in the social media environment as posed by my research question, a qualitative method seemed to be the best methodological option. The specific research topic requires such an approach since the discourse is embedded in social and political practices that needs to be analyzed and take underlying concepts into consideration, which could not be integrated at the same level by choosing a merely quantitative approach. In order to decide on a specific qualitative approach different options were considered, but the research topic requires an approach acknowledging the *interconnectedness of the phenomena under study* (Fairclough, 1985). Especially, the transformation of communication in the digital environment, and the resulting changes in digital

political communication call for methods which enable to meet these contemporary challenges and reveal their impact on societal discourse. This growing influence calls for modern methodologies, since traditional ones are said to lack approaches being able to tackle the growing complexities (Sengul, 2019).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides a useful framework to understand microtargeting on Facebook since it is not only useful to understand the choice of written word within an advertisement, but also the enables to understand them as part of a broader political and social context (Jantzi, 2015; Willig, 2014). Furthermore, *critical discourse analysis* enables to go beyond the possibilities of reception theory only by enabling a coordination of reception on the communication receiver's side and production of discourse on the side of the communication sender/the party. The specific methodology of CDA was chosen due to several reasons. Firstly, the process of influence is very complex and not linear, van Dijk (1995) similar to Jauss (1970) defines reception as "a function of properties of the text as well as of properties of the context, and especially of the previous knowledge, attitudes or ideologies of recipients" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 22). He furthermore classifies advertising as one of these influencing genres, which makes the methodology especially suitable in the context of this thesis (van Dijk, 1995). As van Dijk (1995) states that recipients have the freedom to interpret texts, but they also "may be lied to, manipulated, persuaded or otherwise influenced against their best interests, or in the interests of the powerful speaker/writer" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 22). Additionally, recipients may lack information or knowledge to reveal manipulation, thus he is concluding that "powerful speakers may control at least some parts of the minds of recipients", which may also have implications for social behavior or actions (van Dijk, 1995, p. 22). Furthermore, underlying intentions are not directly observable and the communicational process implies some sort of decoding of messages (Gyollai, 2020). Consequently, the way discourse is exercised may have ideological impacts and reinforce power relations of inequalities, which are especially interesting in the context of elections and electoral campaigns (Wodak, 2002).

While CDA is widely used, it is rather a methodological framework than a specific method, which implies that there is no specific procedure to conduct discourse analysis (Gyollai, 2020, p. 2; Small et al., 2008, p. 22). There are several methods of CDA which have different agendas and theoretical implications, but they agree on "a common set of features, perspectives and commitments" (Sengul, 2019, p. 3). What they all have in common is their mutual understanding of how discourse shapes ideology as well as how these shaped ideologies are then reproduced and connected to power (Fairclough et al., 2011; Sengul, 2019, p. 4; van Dijk, 2015).

The ones recognized for this thesis are the three most common approaches within the field of CDA, namely the Ruth Wodak's *Discourse-Historical Approach*, Teun A. van Dijk's *Socio-*

Cognitive model and the *Dialectical-Relational* approach by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough et al., 2011; Reisigl & Wodak, 2000; Sengul, 2019; van Dijk, 1997).

The *Discourse-Historical Approach* is predominantly used to explore the presence of "nationalism, racism, ethnicism, Islamophobia, right-wing populism, sexism and climate change denial" in the presence of language, which makes it especially interesting to analyze in political communication by considering all available background information also including the historical context it is embedded in (Reisigl, 2017; Sengul, 2019, p. 3). This approach was not found to be suitable, since the aim of the thesis is to analyze the discourse of microtargeting more broadly. Although, it should be acknowledged at this point that this approach can be useful in future research which investigates the presence of these phenomena within specific party campaigns or candidates.

The *Socio-Cognitive model* on the other hand is more concerned with discourse being an "interface between society, mind and discursive interaction" understanding discourse as a result of important actors in a society relying on common frames of perception (Sengul, 2019, p. 3). Although, this represents also a useful approach, the method found to be most suitable, in the context of this thesis and the available data is Fairclough's *Dialectical-Relational model*, which understands the reception process more as an "interaction of discourse practice and social practice", both determining discourse as a whole by showing reciprocal effects (Sengul, 2019, p. 3). Furthermore, the model acknowledges not only the existence but also the strong presence of ideologies in texts as well as the fact that these are open to diverse interpretations and powerful determinant of public discourse. The model is comprised of three different levels*: 1) text analysis 2) processing analysis and 3) social analysis.* Thus, the methodological approach of this thesis will be to combine qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. The first part, text analysis, will be done using qualitative content analysis and sentiment analysis of two samples. This is done by first identifying the contents with the highest number of impressions, sampling them, and then categorizing them into influential or neutral terms as the main coding frame and a set of eight different sub-categories to enable further understanding of the most frequently used terms in the context of an election (section 5.1.1 & 5.1.2). For better readability, these coding frame will be explained in detail in section 5.1.1. The section 5.1.3 of the text analysis will analyze if the most popular topics of the parties' digital campaigns connect to the typical electorate. The last section 5.1.4 within the text analysis level will use the second sample analyzing the sentiment the parties convey as part of their campaign. This second sample will be comprised of the thirty advertisements of each party reaching the highest impression rates and grouping them into the sentiments of positive, neutral, or negative to reveal which moods and emotions they appeal to.

In the second level of analysis the processing of discourse will be analyzed in detail, revealing how the contents and emotions of the text analysis are further processed and thus

consumed by potential voters. This level of analysis can analyze more detailed to whom these advertisements, the specific images, texts, and videos, speak to and how their senders try to engage with the recipients. Furthermore, at this level of analysis the available data about gender- and age-specific targeting strategies will be taken into consideration.

The third dimension will then sum up which overall ideologies can be revealed behind the microtargeted advertisements of the different party campaigns, to enable understand the interests, motivations, and power relations behind them and then provide an interpretation of how this type of discourse impacts society.

This specific approach to CDA allows for a holistic understanding of language and its various aspects in the context of microtargeting, which allows to draw back to the original research question, since Fairclough understands discourse, as a form of communication which can create (behavioral) change. This possible behavioral change is the intended reaction by a party publishing microtargeted advertisements, in order to gain power in the public sphere and a possible explanation for smaller parties gaining influence and the polarization of politics.

Although, Fairclough's (1993) approach does not come without critics and limitations including the possibility that languages differ among cultures and languages, which may have impacts on the generalizability of the results. However, the methodological approach was still found to be the most useful one to investigate the practice of microtargeting, especially because CDA allows for a holistic understanding of political discourse on social media.

4 Hamburg federal state elections as case study

Since the aim of this thesis is to analyze the potential impact of microtargeting on a specific regional German election, this following chapter will serve as reasoning and description of the defined case in terms of the chosen federal state election as well as the chosen social media channel to analyze. This chapter will further deploy the necessary information about the German party system and describe the gathered data set in order to enable a deeper understanding of the case decision making process.

4.1 Regional applicability and differences

There are many contextual factors that must be considered when studying microtargeting, but they also contributed to the decision of whether to select a case study and which case to select. Since most research is done in the US, Borgesius et al. (2018) state, that while the threats are apparent, they can be different in Europe because the legal and electoral systems are different than those in the US and microtargeting on voters may have more limited influence. Also it is argued that, "a political advertiser operating in a multiparty system makes different choices than an advertiser operating in a (de facto) two-party system" (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 5). As

mentioned, in the US, microtargeting is argued to be so successful, because privacy laws are weaker (Dobber et al., 2019). Furthermore, European countries have more legal restrictions and limitations within electoral competition, since many countries in the EU, for example, limit political advertising on television (Dobber et al., 2019). Moreover, by investigating the Dutch 2017 national election Dobber et al. (2017) show how microtargeting including tailoring ads is not only attractive in first-past-the-post systems but also in proportional representation systems. Nevertheless, microtargeting is gaining popularity in the EU with cases investigated in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and France (Dobber et al., 2019; IDEA International, 2018). Due to the increased role of microtargeting in Europe and since scientific research is still rare, this thesis will take at a look at its practice in Germany, more specifically the Hamburg federal elections in February 2020 will be taken as a case to investigate. This case was chosen for several reasons. First, smaller case studies allow for gathering complete data sets on all ad publishers involved in the electoral period before the election and thus determining potential effects on public discourse and electoral results more closely than larger approaches. Furthermore, to understand the possible interpretations of wordings and messages, one needs to understand the used language, as well as it is helpful to be familiar with the party system, which led me to opt for a case study in Germany. Moreover, the Facebook ad library has been introduced right before the European elections and has still been developed for the first time after publishing. Thus, there is limited amount of data on specific elections available. The following elections in Germany were held after the implementation of the Facebook ad library and at the time of data gathering: European elections simultaneously with the Federal state elections in Bremen, which washed the data set and were thus excluded as an option to proceed. Furthermore, the federal state elections in Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia were held in 2019, but the data sets were not as large as one of the federal state elections in Hamburg and furthermore did not all entail ads by every party of the six larger national parties.

4.2 German party system

As of summer 2021, the German federal government is comprised of six different parties, with the CDU/CSU providing the chancellor since four electoral periods (Sitzverteilung Im 19. Deutschen Bundestag, n.d.). Thus, as of Lijphart's (2012) categorization of party systems Germany can be described as a *"multiparty system"* (p.65). The CDU/CSU appeared to be the strongest party 24 times in the 27 national elections since 1949 of which 19 were federal elections and 8 European elections and only twice the CDU fell behind the SPD. Moreover, the CDU/CSU takes almost 100 more seats within the parliament, than the second largest party – the SPD. Although these differences are not representative for all federal state elections in Germany and the share of parties in federal state governments varies significantly, it shows

the competition between SPD and CDU. For example, traditionally, large German cities and city-states were often ruled by the SPD. More generally, one can say that the ministers of the federal states and the mayors of larger cities are often belonging to the two traditional parties CDU/CSU and SPD. Nevertheless, the German party competition is changing and as observed in many other countries the party system is subject to change, especially visible through the rise of the AFD in Germany in a comparably short period as well as the fast-growing influence of the Green Party in German politics.

The oldest German party is the SPD, founded in 1863, and has been already strongly supported during the Weimar Republic, although the party was re-founded after the second world war, since it was forbidden ("Germany - Political Parties," n.d.; Über 150 Jahre SPD, n.d.). After many legislations together with the CDU/CSU the SPD lost support at the national level. The CDU, founded in 1945, has been ruling in the federal government for more than 50 years since the end of the second world war, together with its Bavarian sister party CSU. The CSU was founded in 1945 and won the Bavarian federal state elections since then (Geschichte - Die-1940er, n.d.; Über Uns - Geschichte Der CDU, n.d.). One party, often involved in these coalitions is the FDP, founded in 1948, providing 9 vice chancellors (Decker, n.d.). The FDP enjoyed strongest support in 2009, after this legislative period the party lost so much support, that they could not meet the five percent threshold to move into parliament. In 1980, the Greens (officially Alliance '90/The Greens; German: Bündnis '90/Die Grünen) were founded, entering the West German parliament already in 1983. In 1993, it became a merging party with Alliance '90, as a consequence of the German reunification aligning both ecologist parties in the formerly separate German states ("Germany - Political Parties," n.d.; Grüne Geschichte - Wie Alles Begann, n.d.). The party was elected to government in 1998 for one legislative period, but lost influence after. Today, it gains significance at national and regional level, ruling in Baden-Wuerttemberg since 2016. Furthermore, since 2007, there is the Left Party, an alignment between the PDS, formerly SED, and a SPD fraction called WASG ("Germany - Political Parties," n.d.; Zur Auseinandersetzung Mit Der Geschichte, n.d.). The Left Party traditionally forms part of the opposition at national level and was sometimes part of the legislative government in some Northern and Eastern German federal states. The newest party within the German party system is the AfD, founded in 2013, as a oringially anti Euro-currency party. The party entered the European parliament in 2014, and since then several other federal state parliaments, also being the third largest party in the German federal elections in 2017 with 12.6 percent (Decker, 2020a).

According to a political analysis by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the six parties (here seven including CSU as a separate party) can be positioned according to the figure 2 below. Furthermore, in the case of this thesis it is important to know about the electorate of the six parties. This information can be revealed from the table below (see table number 2).

Party	AFD(Decker, 2020b)	CDU/CSU(Decker, 2021a)	FDP(Decker, 2021b)	GREENS(Decker, 2020c)	LEFT(Decker, 2021c)	SPD(Decker, 2020d)
Self-perception	Anti-establishment party	cross-class people's party	Party of the propertied bourgeoisie	"New peoples-party" or "Alliance Party" (Eubel, 2019) - focus on ecology and climate	Party for democratic socialists(*Partei - Über Uns*, n.d.)	Party for democratic socialists(Schönhoven, 2015)
Special characteristics	-first successful new party in the centre-right of the German party system	-only two of the largest 15 cities were led by a CDU mayor at the end of 2020 -increased competition since 2010 - more middle or lower degrees	-vote motivated by short-term, situational factors and attribution of competence in economic and tax policy -often formal educational attainment	Their approval remains weakest among the over-60s (Probst, 2013)	2017 federal election, the Left Party lost votes in the 45-59 age group gained votes in all other age groups strongest competence in social justice	More popular among Protestants and unaffiliated voters than among Catholics
Expected Electorate	-voters are closer to right-wing extremist convictions -strong support in areas with a below-average household income and/or jobs in industry -workers and unemployed (25%) -employees, civil servants and self-employed (75%) -higher level of dissatisfaction - strong rejection of migration and refugee policy (Hambauer & Mays, 2018) -mobilization of non-voters	-numerically small group of farmers, self-employed, pensioners and civil servants, employees, and workers	-self-employed, freelancers, executives and civil servants are disproportionately represented in the FDP electorate	-service and education sectors, new middle classes in terms of social structure, -income above average, electorate oriented clearly left in socio-political issues -not left any longer in social- and economic policy -high share of voters who identify as apolitical, but vote due to lifestyle reasons	-workers and low-income and low-educated sections of the population -Protest or disappointment and conviction as electoral motives roughly balance each other out	-employees, unionised workers and unemployed -occupational structure becomes volatile, only among the self-employed and farmers quite constantly overrepresented (Spier & von Alemann, 2013)

Age, gender education	-Two-thirds of voters are male - most successful among the middle age group of 35- to 59-year-olds (15%) Formal educational qualifications dominate the middle ranks (Niedermayer & Hofrichter, 2016)	Recently, surplus of women - male voters in the middle age groups migrated to the AfD and the FDP	More men than women vote for the FDP Before 2000 merely older generations, today the FDP is strongly represented among young generations especially age group of 18-24 years old	-more women than men among supporters -just under 15 per cent in the group of 18- to 24-year-old voters -Green voters younger than 35 27.8 % -highest educational attainment among all parties	By gender and age, the electorate is relatively balanced. Although in old federal states there is a stronger surplus of male voters, in the new ones of older voters.	relatively balanced by age and gender Above-average success in the over-60 age group Above-average success among voters with low levels of formal education.
Traditional voter	n.a.	above-average age, practicing Christians are their most loyal voter group.	Protestant middle-class electorate	-Baby-boomer with "post-materialist" values	High earners and holders of higher educational qualifications overrepresented (till 1994)	industrial workers who are close to the trade unions and increasingly the new middle classes.
Geographical focus	Twice as high shares of votes in Eastern Germany	none	Especially economically prosperous regions	urban centers of the old Federal Republic, especially in university towns	Three times higher vote shares in the East, Also, West due to gradient in population density	-protestant areas in the West and Catholic industrial regions of North Rhine-Westphalia.

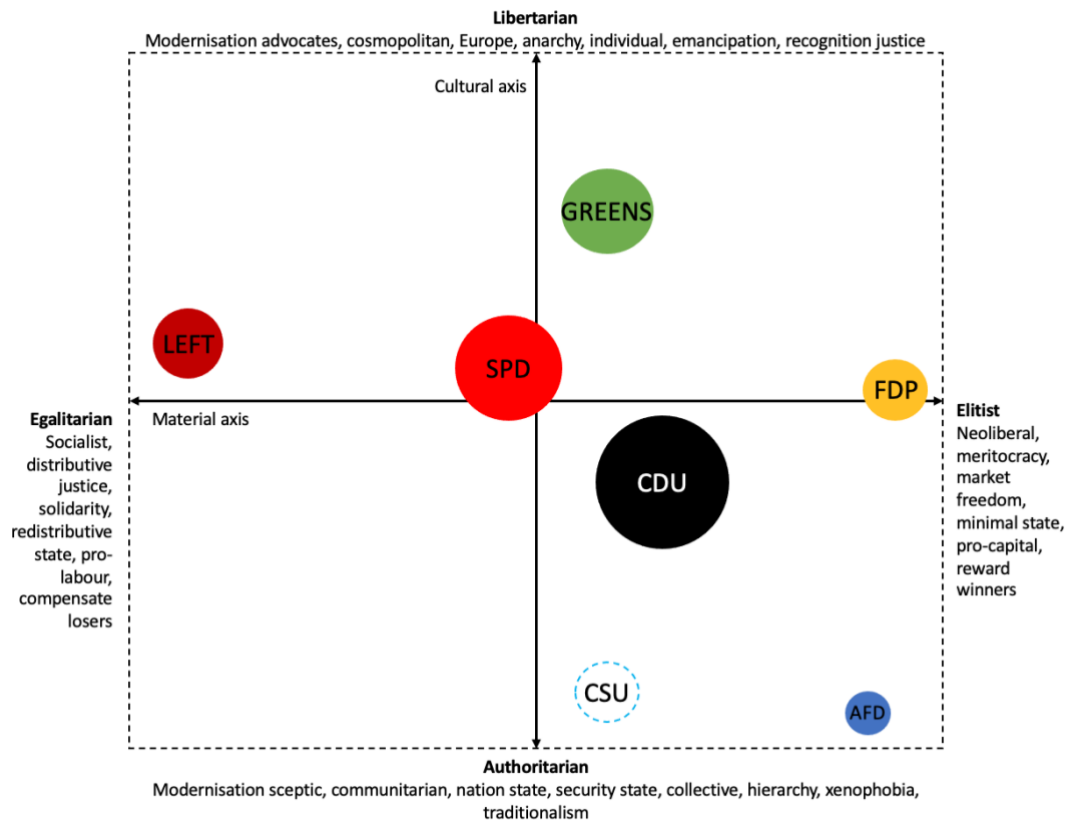Table 2: Description of the German party system and their electorate

Figure 2: Positioning of German party system (Strategiedebatten Der Deutschen Parteien Oktober 2017, 2017)

4.3 Microtargeted advertising in Germany

The practice of microtargeting in Germany is also used to gain more efficiency in the electoral campaign. While the success of this practice is not scientifically proven, there are first steps towards more transparency to justify democratic legitimacy. In Germany, microtargeting has been used more extensively for the first time during the governmental elections in 2017 (Kolany-raiser & Radtke, 2018). During this election the German liberal party FDP managed to target those Facebook users interested in Netflix by showing ads about "Binge Watching", while those interested in Tesla were targeted by ads addressing "future mobility" (Kolany-raiser & Radtke, 2018, p. 2). These new opportunities make the practice increasingly interesting also for parties in Germany. They expect to increase efficiency and improve their resource allocation by targeting those voters who are promising to mobilize. Furthermore, these strategies are designed to gain as many votes from this practice as possible at the lowest possible cost (Kolany-raiser & Radtke, 2018). This is most efficient the more detailed and correct the available data is. Although, the effects are not clearly demonstrated the practice becomes more popular due to the increased role big data gains at present (Kolany-raiser & Radtke, 2018).

On a more regulatory level, *Article 7(9)(1) of the German National Broadcasting Treaty "Rundfunkstaatsvertrag (RStV)"* is prohibiting paid political advertising in traditional media broadcasting to prevent influence in public opinion, while the public television outlets need to provide airtime to parties without charges to prevent additional pressures on financial asymmetries (Dobber et al., 2019; Etteldorf, 2017; Staatsvertrag Für Rundfunk Und Telemedien (Rundfunkstaatsvertrag - RStV), 2019). Furthermore, there is a regulatory difference between the public broadcasting outlets and other media in Germany. More generally campaigning as part of live-streaming, in scheduled linear programs as well as in on-demand formats is prohibited for public broadcasting outlets, while the latter is generally allowed in other tele media but contents need to be displayed separately (Dobber et al., 2019; Etteldorf, 2017). Despite clear regulation about political campaigns in these channels, political advertising on social media platforms is largely unregulated, which makes attractive for parties to use (Dobber et al., 2019, p. 12).

Studies on data of microtargeting in the German context are still rare. One of the few existing studies by Kruschinski and Haller (2017) investigates the practice of microtargeting, here understood as canvassing, in Germany and analyze legal limitations and interview campaign leaders of the elections for the state parliament of Rhineland-Palatinate in 2016. They conclude that all German parties seem to be interested in data-driven canvassing to target voters, only the CDU and the SPD take concrete steps to do so (Kruschinski & Haller, 2017). Although they found several limitations, parties show high interest in adopting data-driven techniques, "without thinking about implications for personal privacy, civil liberties and democratic values" (Kruschinski & Haller, 2017, p. 17). Thus, and since they expect more demand for data-driven campaigns, they call for more debates about how data-driven campaigning should be allowed in European countries (Bennett, 2016; Kruschinski & Haller, 2017).

Hegelich and Medina Serrano (2019) investigate the role microtargeting had during the 2019 European elections in Germany by using the Facebook Ad Library API and the Google Cloud BigQuery API and thus covering advertisements on Facebook, Instagram, Google Searches and YouTube. They point out, that although these interfaces represent important steps of advertising companies to enhance transparency, they do offer limited data on how advertisements are targeted to users, since they only offer data such as "customer, date, spread, and advertising costs," as well as regional and demographic distribution (Hegelich & Medina Serrano, 2019, p. 4). Furthermore, the categorization of why an ad is considered to be of political interest differs among both companies, while Google classifies the content by the paying advertiser, Facebook defines this by analyzing the content, which the researchers point out "are both prone to error" (Hegelich & Medina Serrano, 2019, p. 4). Moreover, and hereby acknowledged to be a possible limitation for this thesis is, they state that this has implications

for the credibility and validity of scientific analyses with these tools, since the processes of definition are not clearly transparent, offer room for technical mistakes and may leave or include data that is or is not of political nature (Hegelich & Medina Serrano, 2019). Analyzing the data for regions and demography they found that some parties seemed to experiment with targeting based on gender, age and region (Hegelich & Medina Serrano, 2019). Hegelich and Medina Serrano (2019) argue that one should not underestimate the role of organic advertising in the electoral campaigns of parties, since the organic share of posts, are often identical to ads, but at no costs, and furthermore not regulated. Comparing paid versus organic reach for example, they found that the AFD has the lowest paid reach, but the highest organic reach, which is ten times higher than the organic reach of the other six parties (Hegelich & Medina Serrano, 2019). Thus, the researchers call for more debate if party posts should also be claimed of political interest and thus regulated, since also other studies have shown, that these posts can impact the public discourse (Hegelich & Medina Serrano, 2019).

4.4 National-regional divide and the case of Hamburg

The federal state election in February 2020 or "Bürgerschaftswahlen" in Hamburg will serve as a case to analyze in this thesis. Generally, federal state elections are said to have a large impact on the national level, since they can represent blocking powers to the legislation, serve a general sentiment of the population or even point out what can happen at national level (Kruschinski & Haller, 2017). Though, the results of federal state elections cannot be generalized since there are also difference to the national federal elections. Firstly, federal state elections generally have lower voter turnouts and greater voter volatility (Kruschinski & Haller, 2017). Voters tend to express their discontent with their current government more in federal state elections than at national level, increasing the possibility for new or extreme parties to be elected (Kruschinski & Haller, 2017). As a result of this underlying phenomenon, established parties need to ensure that supporters will give their vote and thus need to find ways to mobilize them (Kruschinski & Haller, 2017). Second, parties have smaller budgets to run their electoral campaigns, contributing to the pressure to be cost-efficiently mobilizing their potential voters, which leads to a third difference is that in general campaigns are less professional due to lower budgets, although they can still mobilize the expertise in their own parties (Kruschinski & Haller, 2017).

The federal state of Hamburg is one of 16 federal states in Germany but represents, along with Bremen und Berlin, a city-state. Thus, for a legislative period of five years Hamburg's elected government is engaged in local municipal as well as state policy. The city counts about 1.904.444 registered inhabitants, of which 69,14 percent (1.316.691) are eligible to vote ("Endgültiges Ergebnis Der Hamburger Bürgerschaftswahl 2020," 2020). The entry voting age

in Hamburg is sixteen. Traditionally, Hamburg is governed by the SPD, which had the highest share of votes in 14 out of 18 elections since 1957. During the last years, party competition increased in general, and the CDU also won two elections in a row in 2004 and 2008 (Zicht, 2015). Nevertheless, Hamburg had a relatively stable government formed by a coalition of SPD and the Greens, and the majority of inhabitants were satisfied with the work of the government in the previous legislative period, which makes Hamburg a relatively moderate case to analyze in terms of government stability as well as voter satisfaction (*Politbarometer - Bürgerschaftswahl in Hamburg*, 2020). The results of the federal state elections in Hamburg in 2020 can be seen in the table 3 below.

These results translated into the following seats within the parliament in Hamburg: 54 members belong to the SPD parliamentary group, 33 to the Greens parliamentary group, 15 to the CDU parliamentary group, 13 to the Left parliamentary group and 6 to the AFD parliamentary group. Two MPs are non-attached to any other parliamentary group, of which one is a member of the FDP, and one is without any party. The MP without party, will be excluded in the analysis.

Characteristic	2020		
	absolute	%	Change in %
Eligible voters	1,316,691	100	x
Voters/turnout	829,497	63	+6.5
of which postal voters	283,793	34.2	+3.5
Ballot papers cast which were			
invalid ballot papers	8,737	1.1	-1.7
valid ballot papers	820,236	98.9	+1.7
valid votes which were	4,062,376	100	x
votes from cure rule	49,940	1.2	x
valid votes for			
SPD	1,593,825	39.2	-6.4
CDU	453,717	11.2	-4.7
LEFT PARTY	368,683	9.1	+0.6
FDP	202,059	4.9	-2.4
GREENS	981628	24.2	+11.9
AfD	215,306	5.3	-0.8
Others	247,158	6.1	x

Table 3: Final electoral results of the Hamburg parliamentary elections 2020 ("Endgültiges Ergebnis Der Hamburger Bürgerschaftswahl 2020," 2020)

4.5 Facebook advertising and the ad library

This thesis will focus specifically on ads run on Facebook since it is the largest social media platform to advertise in terms of users counting about 2.8 billon monthly active users in 2020.

While Facebook is often considered a first-mover in introducing new features, with other social media channels following after, the *Cambridge Analytica* case as well as Facebook's reaction to it make it especially interesting to analyze (De & Imine, 2020; Speicher et al., 2018). Furthermore, advertising is still considered to be the main income source of Facebook, which differentiates its business model from other advertising channels (De & Imine, 2020). The advertising procedure of Facebook works as following:

> "1. The Facebook Ad platform collects personal data, including user activities (such as likes on pages, ad clicks), about users from various sources.
> 2. It creates user attributes, broadly classified into interests, demographics and behaviour, based on user activities and other personal data through an inference algorithm.
> 3. An advertiser selects user attributes that he wants to target and launches an ad via the Ad platform.
> 4. The Ad platform matches the user attributes requested by the advertiser to those of real users and finds the subset of users that satisfy the attributes specified by the advertiser through a selection algorithm.
> 5. The ad is then delivered to the selected audience, without revealing the user identities to advertisers" (De & Imine, 2020, p. 1058).

Beyond the data Facebook already has about their users, there are data broking companies gathering and collecting data about relevant missing data such as income level which are then used by Facebook to increase advertisement efficiency (Andreou et al., 2018; De & Imine, 2020). Moreover, consent mechanisms on Facebook imply a usage of these data according to the following declaration of Facebook (2020):

> "(1) using data provided by advertisers and partners about user activities off Facebook Company Products to personalize ads and

> (2) sharing data that can identify a user such as name or e-mail address with advertisers are governed by user consent. Other advertising related data processing are carried out based on the ground of Facebook's legitimate interest, where users can exercise their right to object" (De & Imine, 2020, p. 1059; *Facebook - About - Privacy Legal Base*, n.d.).

Although, the data is anonymized and a user's identity cannot be revealed by third parties, these created anonymous user profiles are the basement of Facebook's advertising algorithms intended to match users with suitable advertisements which makes advertising on Facebook a popular service (Tufekci, 2015; White & Boatwright, 2020).

Another reason making the platform an interesting case, is that large parts of Facebook's users are not aware of the fact that its algorithms alter and estimate their interests to show content often reflecting their worldviews and interests. This can make especially those users vulnerable to targeted advertising (White & Boatwright, 2020). Thus, it should be more consciously investigated how electoral campaigns are run on Facebook and to whom there are distributed.

After the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal and before the European elections in 2019, the European Commission exerted pressure on digital platforms like Facebook, Google and

Twitter asking them to provide ad libraries that enable more insights into who has uploaded the ad as well as at what costs and to which group it has been displayed. While the goal was to enhance transparency within the landscape of political campaigning, the regulations do not enable the EU to hold the companies accountable in case of misusage of data as well as they do not force them to improve their ad library services (Jaursch, 2020). As a result, the Facebook Ad library provides access to very limited and broad data, which is also often displayed in vague ranges and thus offers only limited insights in the actual practice of microtargeting (Facebook, 2021). Nevertheless, the data, especially distribution and ad texts can give important insights on how microtargeting potentially affects public discourse and thus electoral procedures.

4.6 Description of gathered data

The *Facebook Ad library* provides an API, that can be used by a Facebook scraper tool in order to create a dataset in CSV format (Skylarcheung, n.d.)[1]. This dataset may include all available fields in the *Facebook Ad library* about uploaded advertisements classified as political by Facebook. Once the necessary steps are proceeded, the data set reveals the following information. Firstly, each ad has an *ad_id* and each profile performing as an advertising profile has a reference number, these columns are displayed as *page_id* and *page_name*. Secondly, there are several columns showing the text that was published or in this case posted with the ad, which have been later summarized by using excel formulas to display all text in one cell. The file is further accompanied by the starting date as well as the ending date of the advertising timeframe. Another two columns are showing the minimum impressions and the maximum impressions reached by the same add, as a sort of range. This is most likely since Facebook does not want to share their concrete impression numbers to limit traceability, thus I proceeded with the average value of these two columns. The same applies to the next two columns which are designated towards the cost of each at showing a minimum spend amount and a maximum spend amount. Moreover, there is a link that enables to open the ad and see the picture that was used. Another two files that are also provided when using the data scraper are the regions, the ad has been shown to as well as the demographics. The regional file shows the *ad_id* again and the region it has been shown in as well as the share of distribution in form of percent. For the purpose of this thesis only the region Hamburg was considered and thus included into the main file while other data has been adjusted accordingly. The demographic data file reveals the following information: Firstly, it entails the respective *ad_id* as well, but it also shows the age groups divided in *18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-65 and 65+*. Furthermore, it shows the

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[1] please see Appendix A and B on more detailed information about this procedure as well as the code used to download the data

gender divided in the following categories: *female, male and unknown*. For all these groups, the last column provides the share as of percent to which these groups have been targeted by a specific ad. These numbers were also in cooperated in the main excel file using excel formulas to enable a later understanding of how the ads are distributed. The data was downloaded for a two-month period before the federal state elections in Hamburg for every ad that displayed the name of one of the six large German parties. Furthermore, ad publishers needed to spend more than 500 Euros to be included into the data set. This step was chosen for three reasons. First, the amount spent on a Facebook ad partly determines how large the number impressions on Facebook will be. Second, this step enabled to exclude single advertisement against or for specific parties by individuals as well as smaller campaigns, by candidates without a specific digital strategy, since these advertisements are unlikely to shape public discourse to the same extend as larger campaigns do. Lastly, this step was also chosen as a factor to reduce the size of the data set, which enables a faster data processing. Overall, the data set is comprised of 3555 advertisements which have been mentioning a specific party name and the ad outlet has a minimum Facebook campaign budget of 500 Euros. After the adjustment of data by including the data about regional and demographic distribution, the file shows 120.073 data points as possible basement of analysis.

5   Findings

This chapter will serve to analyze the gathered data of the defined case study by using the above introduced methodological approach of critical discourse analysis under consideration of the literature review, since this is necessary to answer the question whether microtargeting on a specific social media channel can impact a regional German election. This is done by investigating the two raised sub-questions, concerned with the extend microtargeting is currently used as well as what discursive strategies are deployed by the parties. This first section serves as first descriptive analysis of the dataset enabling to get a broader perspective on how parties use microtargeting techniques during electoral campaigns in this case study. If looking at the data, more generally one can identify that parties give different emphasis to Facebook campaigns, especially when comparing the number of advertisements uploaded on Facebook and how differently campaign budgets, impression rates and regional targets are distributed among parties (table 4).

Clearly, the FDP gave the largest emphasis to their Social Media campaign, having the highest share of ads in the data set with 45 percent (figure 3). The party is followed by the SPD, taking 19 percent of share. The lowest shares can be observed by the Left and the Greens with three and nine percent of share. When considering the total impressions each party's Facebook campaign had, the data shows similar shares among all parties, with the Green Party campaign showing the largest discrepancy (figure 4). However, the data reveals that campaign budget

and the number of advertisements is not the only parameters influencing impression rates. As stated by Hegelich and Medina Serrano (2019) impressions can also be influenced by the organic reach of an ad, which is also increased by the number of followers of each Facebook-page functioning as outlet of the advertisement, which can be observed in this data as well.
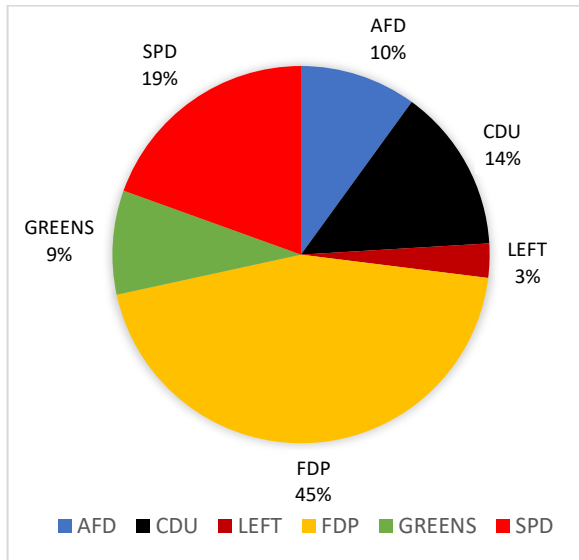

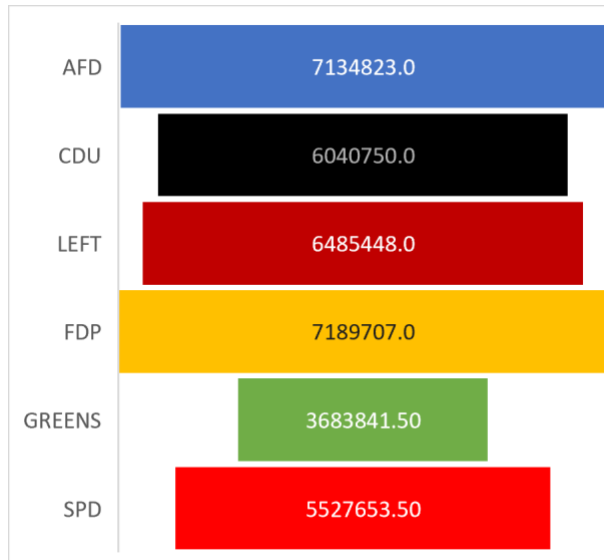Figure 3: Share of advertisements by party (Dataset, 2020)

Figure 4: Total impressions of all advertisements per party (Dataset, 2020)

Party	AFD	CDU	LEFT	FDP	GREENS	SPD
Average regional distribution	37,05%	23,26%	47,63%	84,01%	91,16%	88,23%
Total amount Hamburg	18.236 €	10.548 €	22.790 €	84.687 €	27.433 €	42.617 €
Share of votes	5,30%	11,20%	9,10%	4,90%	24,20%	39,20%

Table 4: Targeting activities of parties (Dataset, 2020)

Another factor influencing how effectively advertisements reach potential voters, the focus each party gave to target specifically the region of Hamburg. This number varies largely among the different campaigns: The CDU giving the smallest emphasis to the regional target with just 23 percent of regional focus, followed by AFD with 37 percent, Left Party with 48 percent, FDP counting 84 percent, SPD reaching 88 percent and the Greens giving the highest with about 91 percent of their ads just shown to Facebook users, and thus potential voters, in Hamburg. Nevertheless, neither the number of impressions, nor the regional targeting focus can be described as proportional to the electoral results.

On a broader level, the descriptive indicators of the dataset do not allow to draw first relationships between Facebook targeting and the electoral results as of e.g., proportions to them. A potentially interesting finding of short descriptive part of the analysis is, that the cost per ad is not necessarily proportional to the number of impressions, while the organic reach of a party's Facebook page has a potential influence, meaning that parties having larger number of followers can micro target their messages more cost-effectively. Nevertheless, to

understand the impact of parties more in detail one needs to consider what messages the parties use to engage with their electorate, thus a more detailed analysis of the text and the conveyed messages and emotions will be done in the next sections.

5.1 Text analysis of political advertisements on Facebook

5.1.1 Discourse in digital advertising in Hamburg

The one hundred most frequently used (political) terms of the published ads have been separated, translated, and analyzed using an open-source tool, that enables counting words in a specific column of a csv file but allows also for the exclusion of non-relevant or by-words (Hawk, n.d.; see excluded words in Appendix C). This step was chosen since "most studies of 'political language' focus on the special words being used in politics" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 33). Hashtags were treated like political words and considered in the analysis. To enable a structured analysis of these terms for the whole dataset and for all six investigated party-campaigns a categorial framework has been developed, which is grouping the most common one-hundred words as a chosen sample into two main categories: 1) influential and 2) neutral. These two main categories were chosen in line with the observation of Roemmele and Gibson (2020) that the new phase of digital campaigning has two versions, the *"scientific"* being informational and mobilization as well as *"the subversive"* undermining these goals (p. 595). Due to the format of content analysis, it was chosen to consider mobilizing words as influential, since it can be argued that a recipient's mobilization can be induced by various terms of influential nature and can thus hardly be separated. Furthermore, the strategy to mobilize voters can be considered as influencing itself. These two main categories are then further divided into four other categories: *1) influential* is split into the sub-categories *issue-related, party-related, inviting/persuasive and individuals* (individual names as well as positions). The category *2) neutral* is comprised by the sub-categories *place-related, time-related, informational, and miscellaneous*. The sub-category called *miscellaneous* sums up all the words not fitting into the other sub-categories. The words which were assigned to miscellaneous, were mostly general words within the political context such as politics, people, society, democracy etc. which do not have a common understanding in public discourse and highly depend on an individual's general knowledge, position but also ideology and are understood differently also among parties. Other words which have been assigned to this category are words, which occurred due to errors or have been missed to exclude, such as for example photo, world, and half. The corresponding table can be seen in Appendix D.

On a general basis the analysis of the most frequently used words in the data set show a stronger emphasis on words that can be categorized as neutral discourse, although almost half of the most frequented words can be categorized as influential. When taking into

consideration the chosen sub-categories, that data shows a more detailed picture, with most words being categorized as place related, followed by the category miscellaneous.
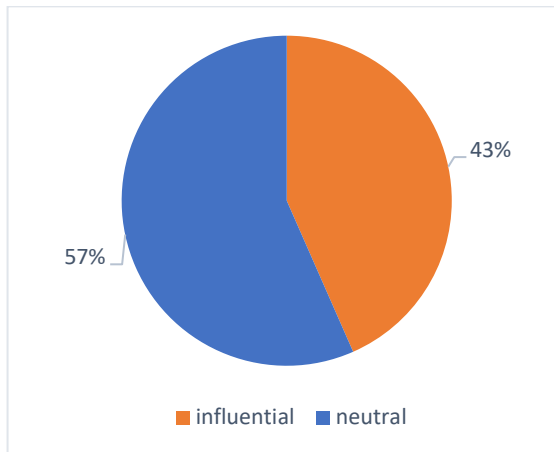

Figure 5: Share of discourse-type by number of word-impressions (Dataset, 2020)
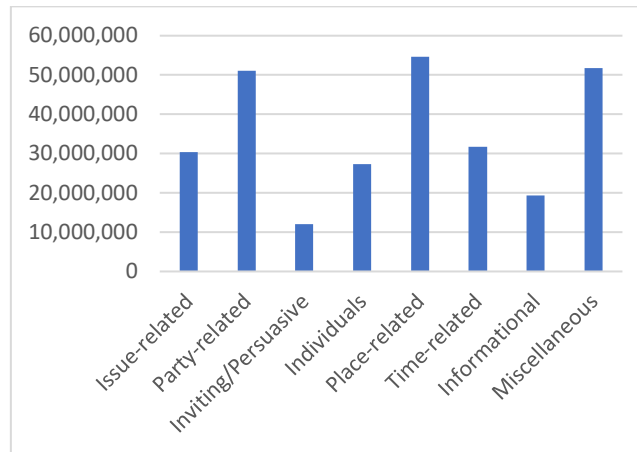
Figure 6: Total impressions by sub-category (Dataset, 2020)

The third highest impression rate of words in political advertisements is related to specific parties. Here it's worth to point out, that the term AFD has the highest impressions compared to other parties, followed by the party names of CDU, SPD, FDP, and the Greens (see table Appendix D). The sub-category party-related is followed by time-related, issue-related, informational, individuals and lastly inviting persuasive. Since the discourse of each party about issues, their own parties as well as the competing parties and individual candidates differs a lot depending which party's discourse is investigated, it was chosen to do a more detailed analysis of each party's most used terms.

5.1.2   Discourse of parties during the campaigning period

Using the same approach of analysis as in the previous section but for each party in Hamburg the content on Facebook per party during the electoral campaign can be analyzed more detailed. The fifty terms with the highest number of impressions were categorized, translated, and further analyzed. The graph below shows an overview of these fifty most distributed words by party assigned to the main categories: *1) Influential and 2) neutral* (see Figure 7).
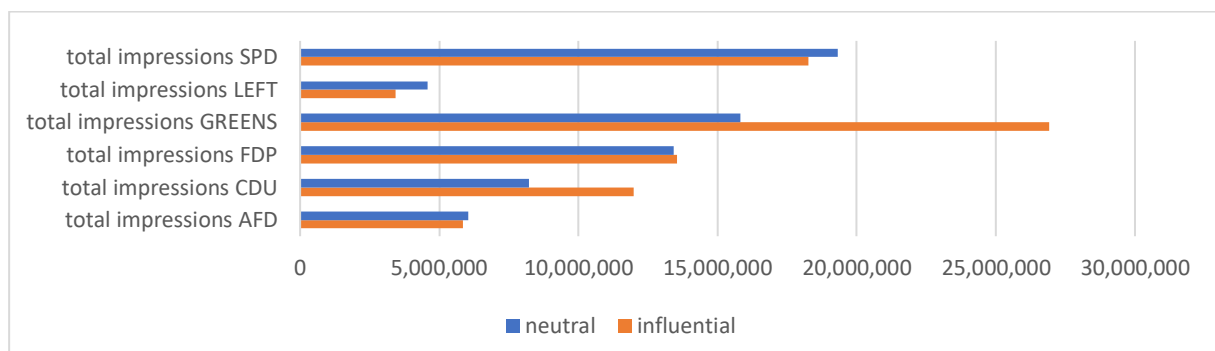

Figure 7: Impressions by discourse type among parties Facebook campaigns (Dataset, 2020)

Category /words	Issue-related	Party-related	Inviting/ Persuasive	Individuals	Place-related	Time-related	Informational	Miscellaneous
AFD	safety, housing, children, drivers, home, property tax	afd, faction, district association, green, old parties	telegram, subscribe, app, russian-german, facebook, member	dirk, nockemann, bernd, baumann, alexander (wolf)	hamburg, hamburgian, harburg, saxony, thuringia, wandsbek, germany	february, january, future, now	election commercial, election, bürgerschaftswahl (name of election), bürgerschaft (name of legislative government), euro, speech, constituency, list position, campaign stand	politics, senate, german, ideology, party, billion, channel
CDU	Willy-Brandt-Street (project), traffic, education, competitiveness, economy, congestion	growing-together-city (#CDU), green, cdu, red, greens, spd	vote	mayor, tschentscher (SPD), marcusweinberg, marcus, weinberg, andreas, goetzwiese,	hamburg, hamburger, hamburgerinnen, winterhude, hamburg's, eppendorf, district, eu	today, now, future, february	Bürgerschaftswahl, constituency, postal ballot, ballot paper, election programme, law, place, state list	senate, campaign, coalescent, people, guests, countries, citizens, facebook
FDP	economy, innovation, company, port, education, digitalization, rent cap, education policy, teaching	fdp, democrats, fdphamburg, fdphh, free democrats	#the-middle-class-is-alive (FDP), vote, elect	spitzenkandidatin, anna (von) treuenfels- frowein, michael, kruse, christian, lindner	hamburg, city, hamburger, hamburgs, hh, germany	now, october, february, future	election, place, bürgerschaft, state list, euro, bürgerschaftswahl, election programme, candidates	support, center, competence, politics, rule of law, standstill, liberals

GREENS	climate protection, climate, economy, traffic turnaround, crisis, energy turnaround, rent, housing, women, jobs, climate crisis, carisover, bicycle city, fridaysforfuture, noise	green, greens, greenshh, greenshamburg	vote, thetimeisnow(#), click, hamburghasachoice(#), timeformore(#), hamburglooksgreen(#), hamburglooksgreen(#)	katharina, fegebank, teamfegebank, fegebankforhamburg(#), rosa, domm	hamburg, city, hamburger, hh	now, future, tomorrow, february	programme, buescha, firstfemalemayor	society, madness, look, with each other, half, trees, wood
LEFT	poverty, rents, housing, rent caps, temporary employment, climate protection, hartz-iv (unemployment programme)	left, left faction, cdu, right, union	Vote	Fabio (de) masi, lara, scheunemann, amira, mohamed, ali, david (three contexts/names), dietmar, bartsch, ulla, taha, gregor, gysi, (nastic) zaklin, susanne (ferschl)	hamburg, germany, harburg, thuringia	february, now, today	Bürgerschaftswahl, postal ballot, candidate, hh election, candidate, speech	people, politics, federal government, society, together, world, bundestag
SPD	climate protection, racism, counter-right, workplace, nazis out, everyday racism, schools, economy, mobility	spd, the-whole-city-in-sight(#SPD), spdhamburg	crosses, votes, ederhofforfuture(#), direct votes, forabetterfuture(#), hamburgvotes(#)	matthias, ederhof, peter, tschentscher, matthiasederhof, danial, ilkhanipour	hamburg, city, hamburger, eimsbüttel, schnelsenimblick, germany, hamburgische, hamburgs	february, future	Bürgerschaftswahl, rank, country list, spdlistposition(#), büwa, list position, bürgerschaft, vote, hhelection(#), hhbue(#), bürgerschaftsfaction(#), election, election spot,	politics, people

Table 5: Political contents by party during the campaigning period (Dataset, 2020)

The data reveals that the written text the ad is accompanied by, had a stronger influential component in case of the Greens and the CDU, while this ratio can be described as balanced between neutral and influential for the FDP and AFD. The SPD as well as the Left Party show slightly more neutral than influential contents, although the disparity is not very high.

When assigning the words to the sub-categories, the data shows a more detailed picture of the discourse that has been merely used during the campaigning period (see Figure 8) The sub-categories which are assigned to be merely neutral forms of discourse will be described first, again mentioning that the category miscellaneous shows all left terms that could not be assigned to any of the other categories (see Table number 5 on pp. 43).
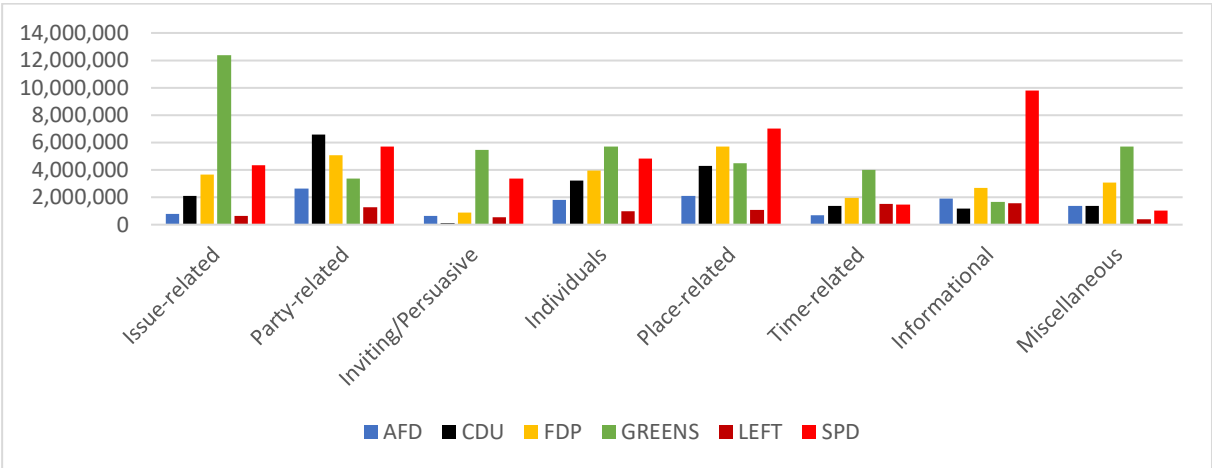

Figure 8: Type of discourse by sub-category per party and impressions (Dataset, 2020)

In terms of impressions and word count the SPD shows the highest numbers within the sub-category of informational words: "Bürgerschaftswahl, rank, country list, spdlistposition(#), büwa, list position, bürgerschaft, vote, hhelection(#), hhbue(#), bürgerschaftsfaction(#), election, election spot" (see table 5)[2]. These words appear to be quite representative for the discourse within this category among all parties, which is mainly describing the fact that there is an upcoming election and describing specific candidates as well as mentioning their ranks on the parties' lists. One term should be mentioned at this stage of analysis is the hashtag "#firstfemalemayor" by the Green Party, since it can send different messages to different recipients. First, it can be understood simply as an information, since the female candidate of the Greens would be the first female mayor in case of winning, but it can also be persuasive for people identifying as feminists and supporting the *feminist movement*. Thus, it was one of the terms hard to assign to a single category but assigned to this sub-category it was found to be rather informational than persuasive, although this categorization might be contradicted.

Within the categories of the place-related and time-related terms, all parties gave by far the strongest emphasis to place-related terms such as Hamburg or districts of Hamburg, while

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[2] direct quotes in this section are retrieved from table 5 unless indicated otherwise

only some terms referred to places outside of Hamburg and are likely to be either the description of an event or a failure of targeting strategies, that as a result, appeared in the wrong region. Among the time-related terms, all parties merely refer to months and days as well as the more persuasive term "now" (except SPD) and "future" (except Left Party), only the impressions they reach differs, but the discourse can be summarized to be of the same nature. Within the main category of influential discourse, there are more significant findings. The sub-category individuals reveals that Greens and SPD have had the highest impressions, although the number of word-counts within this category is balanced among all parties, except for the Left Party mentioning individual candidates' names on average double as often as the other parties, although showing the lowest impressions. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the individual terms of the Greens and the SPD refer to their top candidates mostly, which were running for the position of the mayor and are thus likely to be more popular, than all mentioned candidates of the Left Party. Another interesting finding within this category is that the CDU seemed to mention the office holding mayor "Tschentscher" (SPD) to quite a high extend, which is again a sign for critics or even *negative campaigning*, while other parties merely used their advertisements to support their own candidates.

Within the sub-category inviting/persuasive the Greens and the SPD show again the highest shares not only in impressions but also in word counts, meaning that the parties tried to mobilize or even find supporters. Looking at the specific terms, the Greens use the terms "vote, #thetimeisnow, click, #hamburghasachoice, #timeformore, #hamburglooksgreen" which displays a strong focus on persuasiveness especially if reaching high impression rates. The SPD is using similar persuasive communication strategies showing comparably high shares of words like "crosses, votes, #ederhofforfuture, direct votes, #forabetterfuture, #hamburgvotes".

While the Greens try to link their appearance to change and has simultaneously a strong focus on the term "Hamburg", the SPD seems to rather follow a more future-oriented communication strategy. Nevertheless, both parties appear to be the ones having used influential (as per main category) and clearly persuasive (as per sub-category) terms within their campaigns on Facebook with significantly higher shares than their competing parties, which can potentially have strong effects on individual voting decisions, but also on electoral results when used at large scale and reaching higher impressions rates in future. The third sub-category to be analyzed is party-related, which appears to be the strongly emphasized by CDU, but also by SPD and FDP, while relatively low party-related emphasis is given by the Left. What can be overserved is that parties seem to prioritize these terms differently. While FDP, the Greens and the SPD prioritize their own party-names over others, AFD, CDU and the Left Party mention competitors at least to the same extend as their own party names. In the context of an election and since all these parties are parties of the opposition, this is likely to be a sign for party-critics being part of the campaign.

Furthermore, the advertisements of the Greens show an outstandingly strong focus on issues, which is significantly lower for other parties and the lowest among the AFD and the Left. The issue related discourse of the Greens is mostly concerned with climate-related topics, but also with traffic, although these topics are also emphasized by other parties. A more detailed analysis of issues will be done in the next section since campaigned issues serve a good basement to connect the party campaigns with their above deployed target group of the traditional and the expected voter.

5.1.3 Interplay of campaigning and public discourse

The category, issues of the above-deployed content analysis, appears to be useful to connect the Facebook-campaigns to the public opinion as well as to the previously introduced electorate of each party. The public opinion of citizens of Hamburg about which party appears professional to solve which issue in Hamburg was taken from election polls can be seen in Figure 9. According to Habermas (2006) citizens' attitudes towards public issues "are influenced by everyday talk in the informal settings or episodic publics of civil society" and by the attention they receive by the media (p.416). Furthermore, media can contribute to the *construction of reality* especially within the topics that the public perceives to be important, which is turn often used to evaluate the competencies of parties and candidates (Brettschneider, 2005). Thus, if parties or candidates are perceived as competent to tackle specific issues they can make use of these reciprocal effects, by designing their campaigns around these and thus exert influence on public discourse.

The campaign of the AFD in Hamburg was primarily dominated by issues such as "safety, housing, children, drivers, home, property tax". The issue of safety is strongly used by the AFD, in line with the anti-migration attitude of their electorate since the party tries to frame migration as dangerous, increasing the need for *securitization*. The second most emphasized issue is addressing housing which is perceived to be important in public and can thus potentially be used to mobilize or persuade voters. Interestingly, the AFD shows very low rates in perceived competence to solve public issues, which makes it hard for them to make use of these effects in other areas than their top topics of migration and securitization. Nevertheless, the fact that the issues emphasized by the AFD differ from those perceived as important may be a potential sign of *issue-politics*. This may lead to *political fragmentation*, since it encourages to focus on individually-relevant issues (Borgesius et al., 2018; Dobber et al., 2019).

The CDU for example strongly emphasized traffic related topics as well as education and economy. This also appears to be in line with their perceived competences in public, since it takes into consideration the three topics with higher shares, while neglecting climate and housing as topics since their competence in these fields is perceived less high. A similar

observation can be made for the Left and the FDP. The FDP has given the highest priority to issues of economy and education in their campaign, which is again correlating with the issues they are perceived to be most competent in, while they appear to be very unsuccessful in Hamburg when comparing with the expected and traditional electorate. The Left Party has strong emphasis on housing and topics of *social justice*, which displays to be their main competence in public. These topics also highly correlate with their expected electorate.

The campaign of the SPD on the other hand appeared to focus on topics that do not necessarily correlate with the public opinion about them nor with their traditional or expected electorate, since the fight against *racism* and *climate change* are overrepresented in their contents, while schools, economy and mobility are taking the second rank in impressions. Interestingly, work and housing appear to not be emphasized as strongly as other topics, although the party is perceived to have their key competence in these areas. Despite, this discrepancy, this observation can also be interpreted as a sign for unclear party campaigns, emphasized by Borgesius et al. (2018), since the topics could be focused on social media to reach younger voters.
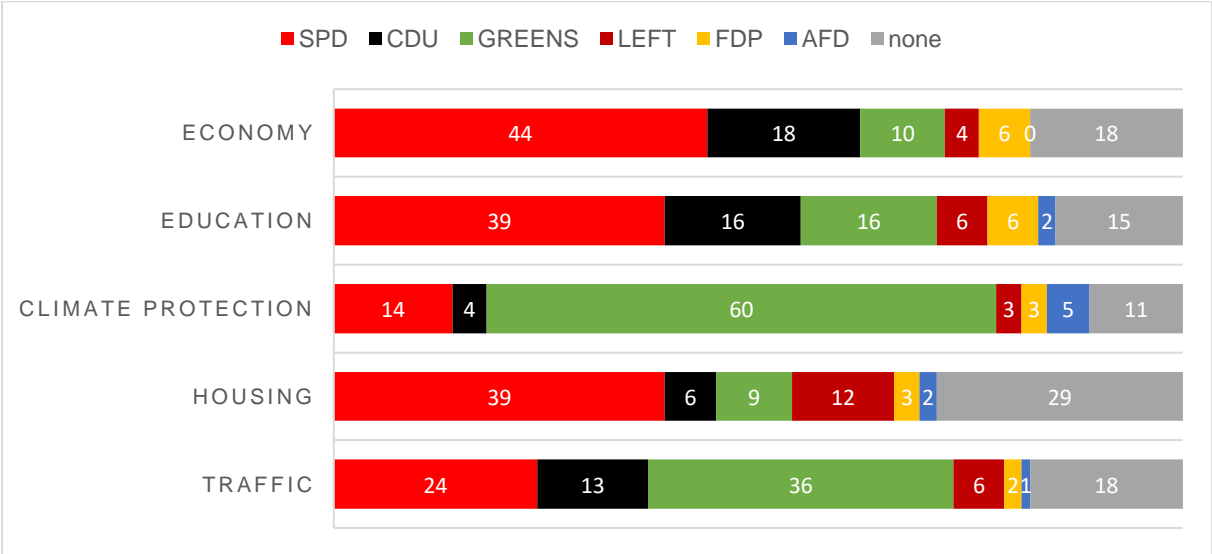

Figure 9: Perceived party competences in Hamburg (Dataset, 2020)

Another interesting observation can be made when considering the issues of the Greens. Their focus on climate related topics displays to be in line with the self-perception of the party as the new middle-class party with a clear focus on ecology and climate. This self-perception as climate-protecting party is also perceived in public, since 60 percent of Hamburg's voters think the party has the strongest competency to tackle this issue (see figure 9). Moreover, the party is anticipated to have a strong competence (36 percent) in solving the traffic issue that appears to strongly influence public opinion in Hamburg and was formerly perceived to be a key-competence of the CDU (*Politbarometer - Bürgerschaftswahl in Hamburg*, 2020). Looking at the issues, the Greens tackle in their Facebook campaign and comparing them with the issues

of highest interest in Hamburg, it appears that the parties' advertisements highly correlate with these, which could potentially be a sign for their success (+11.9%) over the CDU (-4.7%) and the SPD (-6.4%) compared to the previous electoral results in Hamburg, although this observation may only reflect their general campaign emphasis and does not necessarily appear in their Facebook campaign only. Nevertheless, further research about this relationship will be necessary to show a possible causality. Although, the Greens have their geographical focus on university-cities such as Hamburg, the campaign does not appear to target the traditional voter to the same extend as the younger generations. This may have the reason that Hamburg's electorate older than 60 strongly supports traditional parties such as the SPD and the CDU. The election is reported to be won by the SPD due to the high share of over sixty-year-olds voting for them, while they lost strong support among voters younger than sixty (*Politbarometer - Bürgerschaftswahl in Hamburg*, 2020). Especially, among the ones younger than 45 years of age, the Greens happened to be the strongest force. This observation is in line with their expected electorate and might be another indicator for why the Greens tackled issues that appear to be more popular among younger generations.

5.1.4 Targeting emotions to the electorate

Since the content analysis reveals a comparably high share of influential discourse which is furthermore often strongly appealing towards the expected electorate of the parties', it is important to look at the general sentiment the microtargeted advertisements convey. This enables a further evaluation of what and how messages are sent as part of campaigns. This is also important since so far, the texts that have been published as part of the advertisements have been investigated but this did not allow for an inclusion of picture or video material, which also has a strong impact on the recipient of an advertisement. Since the size of the dataset does not allow to click on every advertising link and check the corresponding picture or video a second sample has been created which is consisting of the thirty ads counting the highest regional impressions for each party (32 for SPD).

Party	AFD	CDU	FDP	Greens	Left	SPD	Sum
sample size	30	30	30	30	30	32	182
negative	12	4	3	0	8	0	27
neutral	17	19	17	2	14	15	84
positive	1	7	10	28	8	17	71

Table 6: Analysis of party campaigns by sentiments (Dataset, 2020)

This sample has been further analyzed by identifying the advertisements' general sentiment and dividing them into the categories, positive, neutral, and negative. Positive sentiments were attributed to advertisements, which positioned a candidate or a party in a very positive light by

celebrating success stories, parts of the electoral program and trying to create a positive narrative about the candidate, also including the used music in the background. Neutral sentiments were assigned to an advertisement, if it was mostly of informational nature without a strong emphasis on emotions, introducing candidates, electoral programs or talking about positions concerning specific issues. The negative sentiment was chosen if an advertisement was mainly concerned with criticism about the current government, candidates, or specific issues as well as if an advertisement appealed to induce negative emotions for example insecurity or fear.
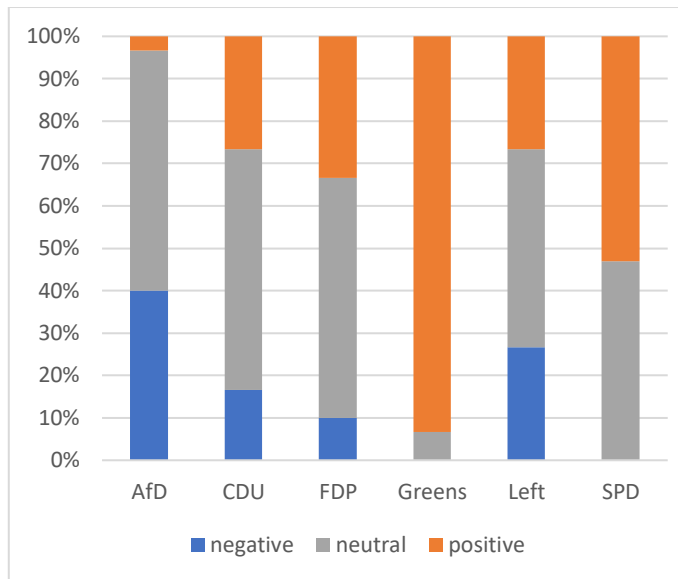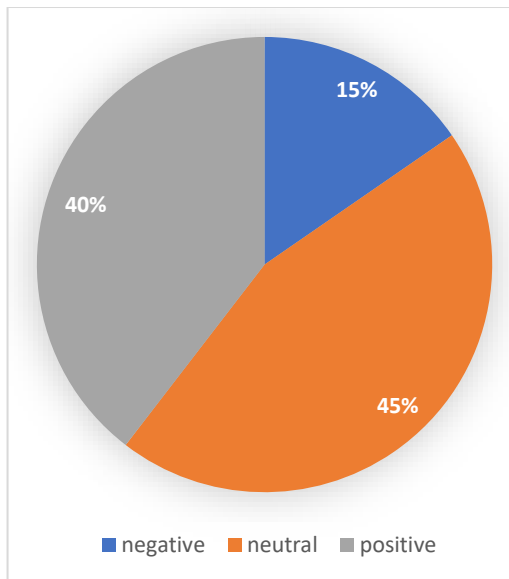

Figure 10: Accumulated sentiment of ads per party (Dataset, 2020)

Figure 11: Share of sentiment per party (Dataset, 2020)

The sentiment analysis revealed that the parties make use of emotions and sentiments very differently in their campaigns, reaching from parties that chose to not appeal negative communication at all (Greens and SPD) to parties which show a strong emphasis on negative sentiments (AFD and Left) (see table 6). Considering the sentiments of all advertisements of the sample the data shows, that about half of the discourse is rather neutral (46%), while the second largest share is taken by clearly positive sentiments (39%) and the rest is assigned to negative sentiments (15%) (see figure 10).

Nevertheless, the single parties appear to have very different approaches towards sending sentiments in their messages (see figure 11). While the AFD conveys a sentiment which is merely comprised of negative and neutral discourse, the Left emphasizes all three sentiments to a similar extend. CDU and FDP, show similar shares, giving low priority to negative advertisements, publishing mainly neutral discourse, which appears to be complemented by positive advertisements, while the Greens and the SPD show no negative advertisements at all in this sample. Among these two parties, the sentiments of the SPD appear to be equally distributed among neutral and positive discourse, while the Greens have a clear focus on

positive discourse and only published neutral advertisements at a low share. This strong focus of the Greens on a positive narrative of their mayor candidate can for example be seen in this advertising text:

> "It is time for a first woman to lead our city - after 199 mayors. It is time for climate without crisis and democracy without alternative. Therefore, vote GREEN with all your votes on 23 February! #TheTimeisNow" (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2020)[3]

The text is combined with a video with joyful background music, showing party members who talk positively about the candidate and the electoral programme of the party, while being on an electoral campaign event in Hamburg. The discourse in this advertisement is encouraging to vote for the party and trying to build the narrative that a female mayor brings change. Furthermore, the text can be perceived as strongly mobilizing. Similarly positive is another advertisement by the Greens, showing their party chairwomen Annalena Baerbock talking positively about their candidate, while at the same time mobilizing voters, since her message implies that the city needs political change to remain great, which can be interpreted as a legitimation strategy for resulting difficulties the recipients may face in the future.

> "This Sunday, elections will be held in Hamburg. For the Hanseatic city to remain as great as it is, some things must change. Katharina Fegebank, a passionate, emphatic and innovative woman, is running for office as a Green..." (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2020)

Similarly, the SPD tries to build a strong positive narrative around their candidate by targeting a video that is accompanied by strong positive emotional music. The message in the video has a clear focus on Hamburg and how the candidate experiences the city, which is especially directed towards feelings of *identity, collectivism,* and shared concerns, while simultaneously sending a signal that his previous work as the mayor was and will continue to be successful in future. This can also contribute to allot the vote to the sender of the message.

> "The-whole-city-in-sight(#SPD) - There is no better city to live in. Hamburg has a centuries-old history and yet has remained young and dynamic... (presentation of destinations) ... what a city, what diversity. And as mayor I want to make sure that everything stays in line." (SPD, 2020)

In all three above-mentioned advertisements by the Greens and the SPD it becomes apparent, that social media campaign strategies further contribute to the personalization of politics. The growing status of candidate images explains the pattern of *candidate-centered electoral politics*, which is in line with Dalton's (2014) observation that, ''candidates' images can be seen as commodities packaged by image makers who sway the public by emphasizing traits with special appeal to the voters'' (p. 215). However, there are several layers of positive sentiments sent to recipients, which can be demonstrated if comparing the two clearly positive communication strategies, with this example, by the FDP:

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[3] This and the following advertising texts have been translated from German into English.

> "The Free Democrats of Hamburg are at your side. - With a policy that is built on expertise. Which takes the economy into account again. Which pays attention to the implementation of education policy. Which leads our city into the future without ideology. Which strengthens trust in the rule of law again." (FDP, 2020)

Here the FDP clearly positions themselves to be a strong partner supporting the recipient by implementing their policies, while simultaneously communicating that there is no ideology to which the party refers. Furthermore, despite the text conveying a positive narrative about the party, it is not as emotionally loaded as the advertisements of the Greens and the SPD. Nevertheless, the text has implications of *criticism* since it conveys that the economy and the rule of law have not been emphasized by the previous government by using the word 'again'. Furthermore, this statement serves as liable communication to give a realistic sense to the expectations of the recipients.

Within the category of neutral sentiments there is merely discourse about specific candidates, issues, and electoral programs. A candidate of the CDU, who chose to publish the advertisements on his own public Facebook profile, made use of the reach and popularity of Friedrich Merz, who is a top politician of the CDU at national level. In the accompanying photo, both can be seen arm in arm, although the discourse itself is held neutrally.

> "I thank Friedrich Merz for his active support in the Hamburg election campaign. Together we will fight for a strong CDU. www.zusammenwachsendestadt.de" (CDU, 2020)

Another ad by the same party also represents a good example for neutral discourse in microtargeting, since it reveals the issue, the position of the candidate towards this issue and the proposal of the party how to solve it.

> "Local transport must be reliable, affordable and environmentally friendly. Then the people of Hamburg will change! Our proposed € 365 ticket is a step in the right direction. www.zusammenwachsendestadt.de;zusammenwachsendestadt.de;Traffic" (CDU, 2020)

Similarly, the SPD chose to use a rather neutral form of discourse, when introducing specific candidates in their advertisements, by mentioning the name of the candidate, showing an image of him in front of a garden house and explaining that he is specifically concerned with issues regarding allotment gardens.

> "On Sunday we give Dirk Sielmann our 5 votes on the SPD state list place 43. Support Dirk Sielmann too, so that in the future there will be a voice for the allotment gardeners in the Hamburg parliament." (SPD, 2020)

Also, issues are often neutrally communicated. In this example by the Left Party, which strongly emphasized the issue of increasing rents in their campaign, while in this ad staying rather neutral in the discourse about it.

> "High rents are forcing people out of the city. 🏠 We must finally take countermeasures! For example, with a rent cap like in Berlin. 🏘;Vote DIE LINKE on 23 February! 📄;www.die-linke-hamburg.de" (Die Linke, 2020)

Within the advertisements that were assigned to negative discourse, there are also different nuances of how negative sentiments are conveyed. The parties CDU and FDP largely refer to a discourse which is describing positions towards issues on a more informative level as in this example:

> "The rent cap is a Trojan horse because it intensifies the pressure on the housing market. Only one thing can help against housing shortages and rising rents: build more." (FDP, 2020)

While within the sample of the AFD, the negative discourse used, is often inducing emotions or positions towards something. One candidate is publishing an advertisement which is a strong negative campaign against Angela Merkel, trying to blame her for high electricity prices, insecure boarders, and low interest rates. At the same time, the message conveys that the recipient can influence these negative developments by voting, which can be interpreted as an attempt to frame a picture of a *positive-self and a negative other*.

> "++ MUST MERKEL LEAVE? ++ YOUR VOTE COUNTS! ++ She has been chancellor for almost 14 years now. Electricity prices high as never before, borders unsecured as never before, interest rates for savers low as never before. It is time to sweep up the pieces behind her and make our country safe and future-proof again! Can Angela Merkel still do it, or should she resign? #wagnerafd #alternativeforyou #afdnrw[4] #afd #merkelmustleave #cdu #csu #merkel" (AfD, 2020)

Another example for the strong focus the AFD Hamburg has on negative discourse is their official election commercial, which starts with the words:

> "Hamburg is the capital of congestion. The old parties stand for nonsensical driving bans, construction site chaos, road deconstruction, destruction of parking spaces, murders with a new brutality, a very high proportion of imported crime and, again and again, left-wing extremist violence... Hamburg's security is in a mess…" (AfD, 2020)

The commercial is combined with black and white pictures and dramatic music, which potentially causes a *strong feeling of insecurity* and can thus be very influential towards voters. Moreover, the term imported crime induces feelings of *xenophobia*. Furthermore, the advertisement tries to frame the issue of security as urging needing their immediate attention. Also, the Left appeals towards the emotions of their recipients, although this ad appears to be less emotional in the text, that it is accompanied by, the video starts with the catching question:

> "Are you also afraid that one day you won't be able to find a flat you can afford?" (Die Linke, 2020)

Similarly, to the AFD which tries to create a feeling of insecurity due to increased crime rates, this question clearly mentions the emotion of fear and creates a feeling of being socially unprotected.

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[4] Advertisement is run by the AfD in North-Rhine-Westphalia, but has been partly targeted to Hamburg and counted high impression rates, which lead to an inclusion of the advertisements in the analysis.

The analysis of sentiments shows how differently each party appeals towards feelings and emotions of the recipients. Nevertheless, even the advertisement that can be categorized as rather neutral often call for action to vote, not only showing how different sentiments are instrumentalized by parties to increase the number of votes, but also how influential and persuasive the discourse in this medium appears, since it is unregulated and does not have a strong control organ. Especially, when looking at the extremes of this sample, it appears relevant to further investigate to usage of sentiments among the parties' social media campaigns. The Greens who merely represent themselves positively and show a strong will to mobilize voters more actively and even openly have been able to increase their support significantly, while the AFD on the other hand did not use positive discourse in the sample and lost support. Both framing approaches can potentially cause horizontal changes. Another interesting finding is that especially the negative sentiments showed strong tendencies towards negative campaigning as well as appealing to negative emotions of recipients such as fear and insecurity. Especially appealing of negative emotions of fear can have long-term influential effects, even more if the likeliness of the target group to be susceptible to the reported threat is considered. If the targeted user can potentially be confronted with the specific fear it might be the starting point of the recipient to form a response- and a self-efficacy towards a threat (Johnston & Warkentin, 2010, p. 551). In the context of an election this means that the recipient needs to be eligible to vote (self-efficacy) and needs to believe that voting for the party can be an effective means to reduce the exposure to the fear (response-efficacy), which would then impact their voting behavior. Thus, depending on how effectively the advertisement are targeted influential discourse can have strong persuasive effects on voting behavior on recipients of their messages. However, how and based on what psychological and social data Facebook's algorithm distributes the advertisements is still unknown. Though, the Facebook ad library allows to at least see which advertisement has been targeted to which gender and age group, which can reveal more information about, how the discourse is processed.

5.2 Processing analysis: Targeting techniques and their implications

"Texts are produced in specific ways in specific social contexts" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 78). Microtargeted advertisements as part of electoral campaigns are created and produced in the specific marketing departments of a party or by commissioned marketing agencies, with the goal to improve public image and increase support among voters. These marketers are experts in their field of communication and marketing, which gives the sender of an advertisement already a strong advantage over its recipient. The context in which recipients of microtargeted advertisements are exposed to these messages is most often in a moment of isolated private social media consumption which makes the target group more vulnerable to the received

messages. Using targeting approaches that differentiate by demographic characteristics may thus enhance the intended effectiveness of a message even more. Moreover, users who are already followers of a party or candidate are exposed to their contents more frequently, which may limit the political attitudes they are exposed to and strengthen the one they have.
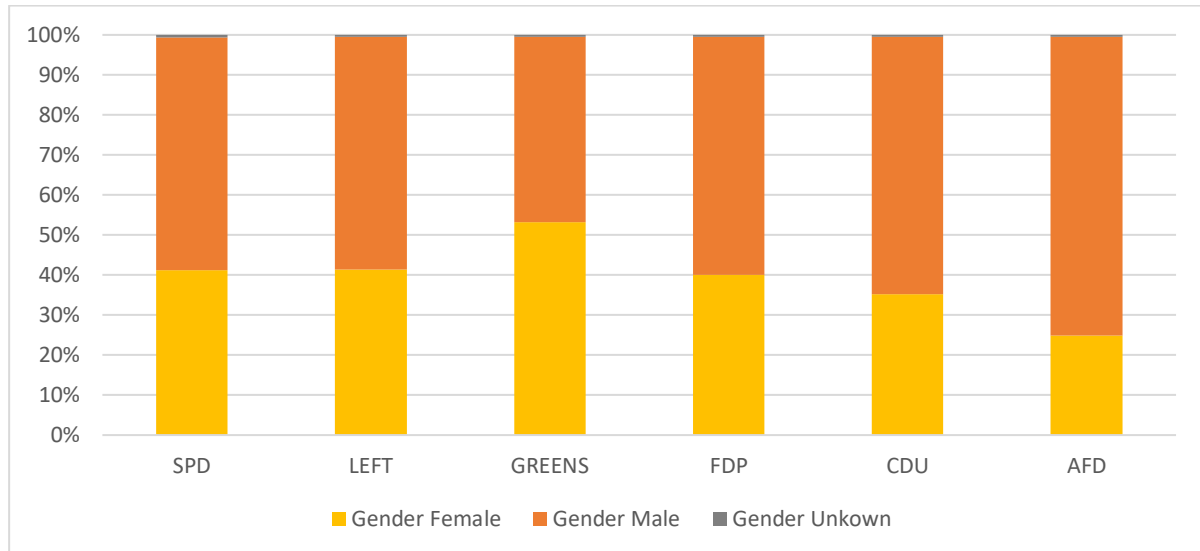

Figure 12: Targeted gender per party (Dataset, 2020)

Looking at the distribution parameters of each ad of the sample from the previous section, it appears that male users are more often targeted by political advertisements on Facebook than female users, with only a very small share of the advertisements distributed to users with unknown gender (see Figure 12). This appears contradictory, since Hamburg's citizens are equally distributed by gender (Statistisches Amt & Schleswig-Holstein, 2021). The Greens are the only party that has a stronger emphasis on targeting female than male users, while the AFD shows a stronger tendency to target men. Nevertheless, the other parties did not target based on gender or did not show a focus on one specific gender, meaning that the targeting focus is overall quite equally distributed in this sample. On one hand this could potentially be a sign that Facebook users in Hamburg are more often male than female, on the other hand and in line with Bol et al. (2020) findings of *digital inequality*, it could be signaling that the Facebook algorithm prefers male users over female users when distributing political advertisements. This would mean that female voters are discriminated by Facebook's algorithm, if parties choose gender-neutral targeting strategies. Another interesting observation that can be drawn from this figure is that according to the voter profiles, the Greens are more often voted for by women and the AFD by men, which is a sign that parties focus on targeting voters based on the demographics of their expected electorate.

However, looking at the advertisements in detail, FDP, CDU, and SPD, did not target their advertisements based on gender, while advertisements which use this demographic characteristic appear to use hidden emotional appeals, to induce the recipient's action. These

appear to be useful characteristics in reader's reception since they are often strongly contributing to a reader's *horizon of expectation* and likely to be interpreted accordingly, which increases the likeliness of a message to be supported by the reader. One advertisement of the Left Party, which is distributed to females only, serves as good example:

> "I want to stop the arms exports that cause people to have to flee in the first place🕊…"
> (Die Linke, 2020)

Weapons and arm exports can be considered as emotional topic since weapons are perceived as dangerous and might connect to feelings of fear. Especially, the discursive combination of weapons and forced migration in one sentence has a strong emotional component, which appears to be targeted only to women to make use of their stereotypically perceived stronger emotional involvement and can be interpreted as *gender discrimination*. Combining this words with the chosen targeting approach is can also be described as "new form(s) of digital inequality" leading to discrimination (Bol et al., 2020, p. 1998; De & Imine, 2020; Speicher et al., 2018). This can also be observed in another advertisement addressed to workers of low wages is targeted to male older than 35 only, which can also be considered as *gender discriminating*, since the female users appear to be irrelevant as target group in the low wage sector and are thus excluded. Furthermore, this advertisement can be seen as critical in the sense that it may reinforce or encourage traditional gender role models. The rights of women in societies do not only have their origin in political decisions, but also in the way how women are represented in discourse, and especially if the discourse is originating from men, in this case a male candidate (van Dijk, 1997).

> "Hartz IV, low wages, work contracts and fixed-term contracts have led to injustice and poverty. You can't mess around with this development, you have to radically reverse it…"
> (Left, Dataset)

Also the consideration of age group when targeting messages is important, since age contributes to the values, which in turn enhance the potential persuasiveness of a message (Chou et al., 2009; Pangbourne et al., 2020).The data enables to identify if the parties or their candidates targeted specific age groups and how strongly the parties used this possibility. In general, the data reveals that all parties' advertisements have reached merely people younger than 45 (see figure 13). The higher social media usage among younger generations might be a potential reason for this discrepancy (Chou et al., 2009). Only the AFD seems to have a different focus in age groups, with their advertisements being quite equally distributed among all age groups.

Nevertheless, looking at figure 14 showing the age groups in detail it appears that the data of the AFD shows an ascending share the higher the age of the recipient, while all other party show a descending share in the same sample. Only within the age group of 34-44 years old to distribution appears to be relatively equal among all parties' advertisements. The CDU, the

Greens and again the SPD, despite a few exceptions, show a similar share among all age groups, which leads to the conclusion that the parties did not use any specific targeting strategy based on age. Although, of these exceptions two were published by a young candidate, who excluded age groups older than 45. This phenomenon of young candidates excluding older generations, is observable among advertisements, of the Greens, the SPD, and the Left Party. The FDP, AFD and the Left used targeting strategies based on age groups to a larger extend.
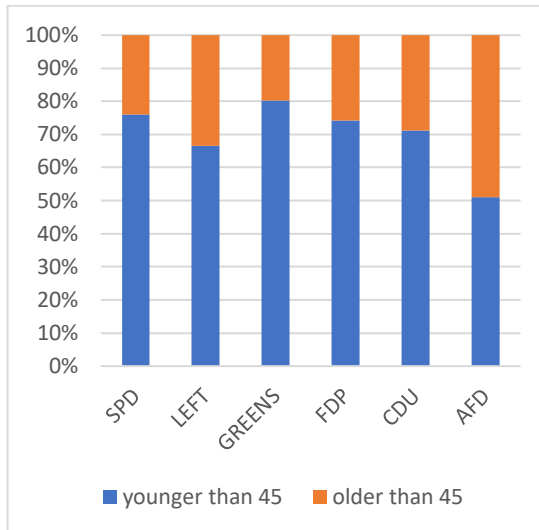
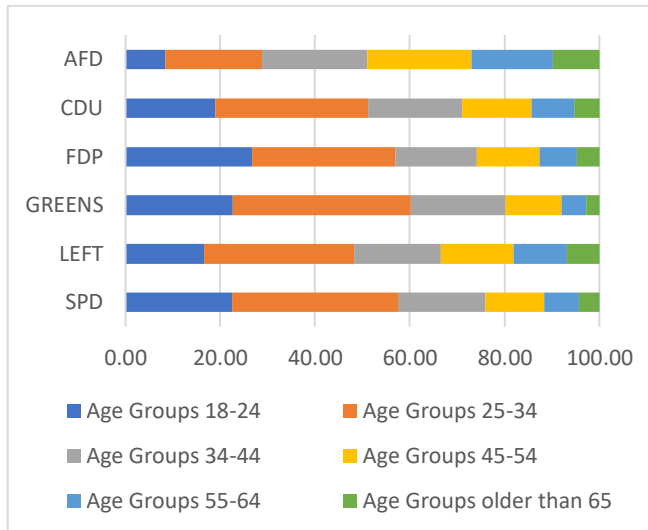Figure 13: Share of impressions by age (*Dataset*, 2020)

Figure 14: Targeted age group per party (*Dataset*, 2020)

The FDP shows a stronger emphasis on younger age groups. One ad for example is only distributed to people younger than 25 and says, "With more speed for e-justice" (FDP, 2020). The targeting of topics of digitalization to younger age groups implies that on the other hand, that people older than 25 are not as attractive to target if the goal is to digitalize the city, which can be interpreted as *age-discrimination.*

A similar observation can be made in advertisements of the AFD, which appear to prioritize not only male users, but also users older than 35, while simultaneously addressing topics, which are stereotypically perceived as interesting within this group, like police and driving. This shows how an exclusion of age and gender is an attempt to reach the right voter and increase votes.

> "Give Thorsten Janzen, a lawyer by profession and candidate on list position 18 of the AfD Hamburg, five votes in the parliamentary elections on 23 February! - Strengthen the police - Limit immigration - Protect social systems - Increase housing subsidies - Stop climate hysteria - Make driving possible" (AFD, dataset)

Whether recipients respond differently to a message if it is targeted towards their gender or age group is has been discussed frequently in research about emotional marketing (Fisher, 2005). Research has shown that the involvement of emotions in marketing do not necessarily show similar effects among all demographic groups. Gender and age groups play a role in how a recipient reacts to an advertisement and can thus have influence on the persuasiveness of

it (Libert, 2014). People older than 35 appear to be more vulnerable towards emotional appeals of advertisements, while the simultaneously represent the largest voter groups. Although, the share of social media activity is less among these age groups, their share of the German demography is higher and should thus not be underestimated (*IT-Nutzung - Personen Mit Internetaktivitäten Zu Privaten Zwecken Nach Alter*, 2020). Although, the data shows, that these demographic targeting strategies are only used to a comparably small extend in this case study, it also reveals that first attempts are made to target emotions more finely towards these attributes also in political campaigns. Furthermore, these advertisements appear to be strongly loaded with stereotypical language and content, which can be described to gender as well as age discriminating. Nevertheless, if these approaches continue to be advanced social media campaigns can potentially become more persuasive in winning voters, but also in reinforcing and encouraging discrimination as part of targeting strategies. Moreover, the available data does not show if there are more factors that determine who is receiving a targeted advertisement, which is not likely to be a technical limitation, but rather appears to be a sign that Facebook is not willing to publish this data.

5.3 Social analysis: Implications of microtargeting on public discourse

Van Dijk (1995) defines reception as "a function of properties of the text as well as of properties of the context, and especially of the previous knowledge, attitudes or ideologies of recipients" (p. 22). Furthermore, *discourse itself shapes and reproduces ideology* and is connected to power (Fairclough et al., 2011; Sengul, 2019; van Dijk, 2015). Commercial advertising often creates and encourages identities with the goal to increase the sales of products and services. These contents are often loaded with stereotypes, which can be similarly observed in advertising about political parties or candidates during the period before the election in Hamburg. As van Dijk (1995) states, recipients have the freedom to interpret texts, but they also "may be lied to, manipulated, persuaded or otherwise influenced against their best interests, or in the interests of the powerful speaker/writer" (p. 22). Furthermore, the discrepancy between parties and citizens in levels of information, knowledge and power is often guided by the *public control organ*, which appears to be a lot weaker in microtargeting. This does not necessarily translate directly into a horizontal change for the recipient since the process of influence is very complex and not linear, but it can be argued to have effects on the recipient if targeted by repetitive emotionally as well as ideologically loaded contents. Moreover, the communicational process implies some sort of decoding of messages and underlying intentions of messages are not directly observable (Gyollai, 2020). In combination with the isolated consumption of politically loaded content, strong different positions, and

negative campaigning, this new form of political campaigns may enhance an individual's identification with a party, an idea or ideology and thus enforce a polarization of society.

Overall, the analysis reveals that discursive strategies such as legitimation strategies as well as the framing of images of a positive-self and negative other as in other political campaigns, have been apparent also in the digital environment. Moreover, and in line with observations of party campaigns in other media outlets, the digital campaigns show a strong tendency towards a personalization of politics, especially through targeting candidate images and videos. According to Harker (2020) the interest of platforms to maintain stability in public debates is not as high as for traditional media and untransparent politics might be encouraged in areas of weak public control. While traditional media have stronger ethics, laws, and guidelines about which content of political campaigns can be shown and which must be rejected, these are not the same for Facebook. Moreover, the active role Facebook takes in consulting political campaigners to send their messages more effectively makes this conflict even more urging, since Facebook often represents itself being neutral, but is taking an active role in how to micro target users (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018; Tufekci, 2015).

Roemmele and Gibson's (2020) study about political campaigns in the digital era revealed that there are two versions of microtargeting, the *"scientific"* representing techniques to enhance mobilization and the spread of information and the other one being "the subversive", undermining these goals (p. 595). This can be observed as well in case of the Hamburg federal state elections. The analysis of the campaign discourses on Facebook in context of the elections shows how voters become more vulnerable to political messages. On one hand neutral and information-loaded content is taking a strong share in these samples, giving information about postal ballots, the elections, and specific issues. On the other hand, the information levels regarding issues are often superficial and do not allow for a stronger examination with them. Furthermore, there are strongly influential components in the campaign discourse, which can be described as *"subversive"* (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020, p. 595). These rather appear to be beyond mobilizing and informing as well as seem to be represented as the only truth. Although, the sentiments differ their analysis revealed that most discourse is rather extremely positive or negative than neutral, which can be argued to be influencing recipients. Thus, one interpretation of the findings can be that microtargeting is a tool to practice if the goal is to increase political participation but at low information levels.

Especially, how parties target, design, and process their messages, is often strongly stereotypically loaded, contributes to a voting culture which is emotionally and ideologically motivated. There is a clear narrative about Hamburg as being a city to identify with, which increases local identity. Furthermore, the advertisements are appealing towards emotions of various natures, combined with calls for change, they touched several topics such as the need for *securitization,* due to increasing migration as well as the *social insecurity*, due to housing.

Moreover, the discourse itself and its distribution touched concepts such as *ageism, xenophobia*, as well as *sexism*. Negative campaigning took a comparably low share among all advertisement but was apparent.

As a result, these messages can promote or reinforce, amongst other, *ageist, sexist, and xenophobic worldviews* which are problematic for a diverse society and, as a minimal consequence, can create feelings of exclusion. Even those advertisements that seem neutral are often finely targeted towards specific genders or age groups to maximize possible outcomes. In the case of the Hamburg federal elections, the extent to which microtargeting reached the voters can be described to be relatively low. However, campaign budgets and impressions increase with the popularity of social media due to, for example, changing demography, meaning that the role of microtargeting is likely to increase in future. Thus, parties will increase their budgets the higher the number of possible voters to reach by digital tools, increasing citizen's exposure to this sort of online discourse.

An election is a process of power formation, with the voter deciding who is in power, although often the one being highly exposed to existing power asymmetries. The high extend to which these campaigns aim to influence voters using somewhat unethical discursive and targeting strategies, which Facebook still distributes to its users, call for a different regulatory than the currently taken self-regulatory approach.

6 Conclusion

Since research about the way microtargeting is used in practice in a European context is still scarce, this thesis aimed to analyze how microtargeting potentially impacts an election at regional level. Investigating the specific case of Hamburg, it has been analyzed to what extend the main parties have targeted advertisements on Facebook and which discursive strategies they used.

First, the findings show that all six parties used microtargeted advertising as part of their campaigning activities before the Hamburg federal state election. Although, parties gave different emphasis to microtargeting on Facebook, revealing how financial asymmetries exist but do not necessarily impact the number of impressions, since they are also determined by the organic reach of a party's or candidate's Facebook page. Furthermore, there were no identifiable correlations between electoral results and targeting indicators.

When looking at the content and discourse that took place on Facebook across all parties, neutral discourse was slightly overrepresented compared to discourse that has influential components, although this share varies among parties. However, neutral, and information-loaded content took a large share, but often had very superficial information levels and very neutral sentiments have been hardly found in the data. The texts had a stronger influential component in case of the Greens and a strong persuasive component for the SPD, which were

in both cases combined with very positive sentiments. Both parties appeared to not use negative sentiments in their advertisements, while the AFD largely focused on negative feelings in their campaign. Advertisements with negative sentiments showed strong tendencies towards negative campaigning and appealing towards negative emotions of recipients by inducing fear and feelings of physical and social insecurity. Furthermore, all parties appeared to have linked their Facebook campaigns closely to the expected electorate in contents, as well as in demographic targeting approaches, also considering their public image. There were signs that microtargeting increases issue-politics and unclear party-campaigns, that may have long-term effects on public discourse and on how voters perceive parties and their electoral programs. Moreover, the practice of microtargeting may contribute to the growing role of personalized politics and how candidate images are used to appeal voters.

Combining the parties' discursive and targeting strategies, the data showed how messages, often strongly stereotypically loaded, contribute to a voting culture which is emotionally and ideologically motivated. Furthermore, the data showed how *local identity, xenophobia, sexism* and *ageism* occurred in campaign discourses, which induces digital inequality and reflects Roemmele's and Gibson's (2020) argument that the *"subversive"* form of microtargeting is very apparent and undermining the potential positive consequences of targeting political advertisements (p. 595). Especially, targeting based on gender and age groups appeared to encourage the use of stereotypes in language and revealed sexist and ageist attitudes in some cases, despite these targeting strategies being reported to increase the persuasiveness of messages (Libert, 2014).

What can be revealed looking at all findings is that the Green Party managed to frame itself very positively and has used influential discourse to a high extend, as well as they have strongly emphasized their expected electorate when designing and targeting their campaign, which may have contributed to their overall plus of 11.9 percent in electoral results. The analysis of the campaign discourses on Facebook in context of the elections shows how voters become more vulnerable to political messages of advertisements. Moreover, it appears that the discourse of party campaigns in the online environment is very strong, ideologically motivated and may encourage a polarization of society. Furthermore, the large share of discourse aiming to convince voters rather than to inform them, leads to the assumption, that microtargeting is a tool that serves to win potential voters at lowest possible information levels.

One interesting observation, calling for further research, is that male users are more often targeted by political advertisements on Facebook than female users, which could either originate in the demographic structure of Facebook users in Hamburg or be a signal that Facebook's algorithm prefers male users over female users when distributing political advertisements. This would induce informational asymmetries among genders in the online environment and reinforce *gender inequality*. Further research will also need to investigate

how discourse differs among analogue and digital party campaigns as well as if there are regional variations, to enhance understanding about their difference and if online campaigns are more emotionally loaded.

One possible limitation of the study is that influential and mobilizing discourse can hardly be separated using this methodological approach, which led to their assignment in one category. It can be argued that using only mobilizing discourse can enhance political participation, increase voter turnout and might be a positive consequence of microtargeting, that could not be separated in this thesis. Nevertheless, all types of discourse impact public opinion, and their effects need to be balanced in order to safeguard public discourse. A discourse-type which is only mobilizing and does not have hidden persuasive interests will hardly be found in paid contents within electoral competitions between parties. Moreover, the available data does not allow a consideration of various other user characteristics, advertisers can choose from when targeting messages. Although, these are also determining which user is exposed to what message leaving a lot of potentially interesting discursive strategies of parties and candidates aside. The way how Facebook's algorithm distributes advertisements to its users contributes significantly to the level of its persuasiveness, which will need to be further understood to enhance generalizability of results. Still, the results of this study represent a first step towards revealing hidden discursive strategies as part of microtargeting campaigns on Facebook in a European context.

The very definition of a *democracy* is that *people emanate power*. In contemporary democracies people exercise their power by voting, which is the basic form of political participation and the one that can be done at lowest levels of information and opportunity costs (Schmitt, 2014). According to Castells and Cardoso (2005) "political opinions and behavior are formed in the space of communication", and advertising is one medium of how parties and candidates try to communicate to the electorate (p.14). In times during which a large part of communication has gone digital, it is no surprise political campaigners adopt to this new environment and start to make use of digital advertising in social media.

However, the recent case of the INSM campaign as part of the national electoral competition in Germany demonstrates how microtargeting escapes the public eye, while the Cambridge Analytica scandal shows how these strategies are geared towards influencing electoral results and how much money is involved in these business fields. In order to safeguard public discourse in the digital environment, we need to find new ways how social media companies acknowledge democratic values as much as their liberal business interests. One important goal of this process would be a true confession of their role in public discourse, especially in the context of electoral campaigns and elections, starting to regulate political advertisements and targeting approaches. In best case, combined with an honest cooperation with researchers and authorities to limit the influence on an individual's electoral decision.

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Appendix A Description of Data Gathering Process

In Facebook Ad library - Example of Bürgerschaftswahl Hamburg
Date of election: 23.02.2020

In order to define a framework for the data set I chose to look at a two-month period before the regional election. In the case of the elections in Hamburg this led to a date framework of: 23.12.2019 – 23.02.2020. Furthermore, I defined the region in which the ad has been displayed to Facebook users as Hamburg. In the case of region, this means the data scraper also includes ads that were not exclusively shown in Hamburg. Thus, the data needed to be adjusted later and only be included to the percentage it was shown in Hamburg during the defined campaigning period.

The work with the data scraper allows to either search ads by looking at specific *page_id*(s) which show the ads that were commissioned by the administrators of the Facebook page of *DIE_LINKE_HAMBURG*, but the results showed that this leading to only include obvious outlets and led to very small data sets. As an example, the CDU Hamburg with this function ended showing just 88 ads. Thus, I used the second function the data scraper allows to use, which is searching by defining a *search_term(s)*. I decided to focus on the larger parties in Germany including *CDU/CSU, SPD, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, FDP, DIE LINKE and AfD* to enhance the sample size but reduce the search intensity as well as the regional complexities in party differences. For each party I created a search term with the party name and sorted the CSV by the funding entity to enable an identification of the Facebook outlets funding the parties at on a broader scale. The broader scale was defined to be an investment in ads of more than *500 Euros*. This procedure allowed to increase the number of ads, taking the example of the CDU again, from 88 to 500 ads.

After identifying the main funding entities for each party and its candidates Facebook campaign, I downloaded a second CSV only including the relevant data, by creating the function by-lines and defining the funding entities that should be included in the file, which in turn excluded every small ad addressing the party. In cases where I was unsure about the originate of the funding entity, especially in case of specific regional candidates, that did not include the party name in page name nor *funding_entity* I doublechecked the add by using the accompanying link and verifying the party logo in the ad picture or the *ad_creative_body* (ad text) in case of *#DIE LINKE*. A smaller number of ads was funded by third parties such as organizations or magazines. One example, in case of the AfD in Hamburg is the magazine Deutschland Kurier creating 21 ads spending about 3,500 Euros which is an AFD close magazine, and the ad text was clearly pro AfD and discussing their view on policies and specific issues. Every of these final data files, is accompanied by two additional data files.

These files show the regions in which a specific ad (per ID) has been displayed and to what percentage, as well as the demography of users it has been shown to, also in percentage. After merging all downloaded files from the different parties to one single worksheet per election and formatting the columns of AD ID as number in each of the sheets, the two additional files were added as separate sheets to enable easy data gathering.

Next step was to include the percentages of regions and demography into the main worksheet. In the case of the regions sheet, this was done by using the function SUMIFS excel function, which displays the percentage in the field, if the criteria "Ad ID the same" and "region Hamburg" are fulfilled. The same function was used for the sheet showing the demographical spread by defining the criteria according to "Ad ID the same", gender (unknown, female, male) and age group (18-24; 25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64; over 65). All fields have been converted to numbers using six after comma spaces. Here I excluded the group of younger than 18 years, since voting ages differ among elections and federal states.

These were the Identifications in the Hamburg case:

Hamburg: list by-lines

CDU/CSU	SPD	Die Grünen
CDU CDU Hamburg CDU Hamburg-Nord CDU/CSU-Bundestagsfraktion CDU/CSU-Gruppe in der EVP-Fraktion im Europäischen Parlament Roland Heintze	Alexander Dietrich Astrid Barbara Asta Hennies Matthias Ederhof SPD Bürgerschaftsfraktion Hamburg SPD Hamburg SPD Hamburg-Mitte SPD-Bundestagsfraktion SPD-Fraktion im Bundestag Danial Ilkhanipour	Grüne Altona GRÜNE Hamburg GRÜNE JUGEND Hamburg Kreisverband GRÜNE Eimsbüttel
FDP	**AfD**	**DIE LINKE**
Andreas Moring Anna von Treuenfels-Frowein (Spitzenkandidatin der FDP Hamburg für die Bürgerschaftswahl 2020)) Anna von Treuenfels-Frowein (Vorsitzende der FDP-Fraktion in der Hamburgischen Bürgerschaft) Christel Helene Nicolaysen FDP FDP Fraktion Bundestag FDP Hamburg	AfD Bezirksverband Hamburg-Harburg AfD Fraktion Bezirk Eimsbüttel AfD Hamburg AfD Hamburg-Nord AfD Hamburg-Wandsbek AfD Thüringen AfD-Fraktion Hamburg Alternative für Deutschland Mayen-Koblenz André Wendt Andreas Dietgar Lohner Bernhard Zimniok Birgit Bessin	DIE LINKE DIE LINKE Hamburg DIE LINKE. Wandsbek Dominik Mikhalkevich Fraktion DIE LINKE. im Bundestag Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Simon Dhemija

FDP Hamburg-Mitte	Deutschland Kurier	
Fraktion der Freien Demokraten	Dr. Alexander Wolf	
FDP-Fraktion in der Hamburgischen Bürgerschaft	Dr. Sylvia Limmer	
	Gunnar Norbert Lindemann	
	Hans Rüdiger Lucassen	
Johannes Vogel	JAfD	
Jonas Bayer	Jörn König	
Junge Liberale Hamburg e.V.	Kai Kristian Laubach	
Katarina Blume	Markus Alfred Wagner	
Kurt Carlos Duwe	Markus Buchheit	
Marco Buschmann	Markus Frohnmaier - AfD	
Michael Kruse	Olga Petersen	
Moritz Heimo Körner	Robert Farle	
Svenja Ilona Hahn	Thomas Reich	
Timo Fischer		
VDMA		

Appendix B Code Facebook ad library scraper

Example of Hamburg federal state elections (Bürgerschaftswahl)

STEP 1:
Example of Hamburg Bürgerschaftswahl – Reduction of Funding entities to entities spending more than 500 Euros

```
# This access_token is a User access token w/ permission to access API
access_token:
EAAQWFM486zEBAPwqZAYCIYcLMXRsmAM1ZCZB2mgXKkqcEBqtWVjB5f256lt4DpvzmM
wdRyws2CIOinR0pkHRqvBv3QpCOKCEeLU88ptyxrozYvohoj3C3lRCuy5t5uc3ZBiMxBF6gP
bmz58iikpvMw0u7ZAgNxG9yMgZAZBdvpZB5irR4sLaSjhH


page_total: 1000   # Should be a maximum of 1,000
search_total: 20000   #

ad_active_status: ALL   # ACTIVE, INACTIVE, or ALL
```

BEGINNING WORKING FIELD####

```
# Either / Or
search_terms: LINKE
#search_page_ids:   # Max 10 pages
#  - !!str 130273271119  # page_ids should be str, not int


# Filter funding_entity
# bylines:
# - DIE LINKE


ad_delivery_date_min: 2019-12-23
ad_delivery_date_max: 2020-02-23


countries:
  - DE


regions:
  - Hamburg
```

END WORKING FIELD####

```
# Fields for the unnested CSVs
demo_fields:
 - ad_id
 - age
 - gender
 - percentage

region_fields:
 - ad_id
 - region
 - percentage

demo_ages:
 - 18-24
```

- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

demo_genders:
 - male
 - female
 - unknown

Fields which are included in the main CSV, including derived fields
output_fields:
 - ad_id
 - page_id
 - page_name
 - ad_creative_body
 - ad_creative_link_caption
 - ad_creative_link_description
 - ad_creative_link_title
 - ad_delivery_start_time
 - ad_delivery_stop_time
 - funding_entity
 - impressions_min
 - impressions_max
 - spend_min
 - spend_max
 - ad_url

Fields for querying all possible metadata from the API
query_fields:
 - ad_creation_time
 - ad_creative_body
 - ad_creative_link_caption
 - ad_creative_link_description
 - ad_creative_link_title
 - ad_delivery_start_time
 - ad_delivery_stop_time
 - ad_snapshot_url
 - demographic_distribution
 - funding_entity
 - impressions
 - page_id
 - page_name
 - region_distribution
 - spend

STEP 2:
Example of Hamburg Bürgerschaftswahlen – Filtering largest funding entities including privately processed ads

BEGINNING WORKING FIELD####

Either / Or

```yaml
search_terms: LINKE
#search_page_ids:   # Max 10 pages
#  - !!str 130273271119  # page_ids should be str, not int

# Filter funding_entity
 bylines:
 - DIE LINKE
 - DIE LINKE Hamburg
 - DIE LINKE. Wandsbek
 - Dominik Mikhalkevich
 - Fraktion DIE LINKE. im Bundestag
 - Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung
 - Simon Dhemija

ad_delivery_date_min: 2019-12-23
ad_delivery_date_max: 2020-02-23

countries:
  - DE

regions:
  - Hamburg

#### END WORKING FIELD####
```

Appendix C Excluded terms original language

zu,um,für,machen,am,der,über,gerade,nicht,allem,vor,diese,ein,sich,setzt,ihre,aus,als,einsetze,mich,ich,wofür,ihr,werden,den,soll,es,durch,wird,zur,zum,zusätzlich,geht,immer,nach,gebracht,eine,im,sollen,dann,hat,wenn,fallen,einer,völlig,beiden,ab,warten,unseren,haben,dass,so,gemacht,dadurch,ersetzt,er,mehr,nun,dieses,das,eingesetzt,dieser,teil,größte,jedem,bei,noch,auch,neben,möchten,wir,denn,braucht,weshalb,erneut,einsetzen,alle,vehement,weiterhin,des,jedenfalls,doch,muss,irgendwie,von,unter,zwischen,man,außerdem,deren,einseitig,sein,einen,leben,wollen,hingegen,folgen,sind,deutlich,zeigt,großteil,anderen,wochen,letzten,einem,wieder,darum,fordern,mit,keine,fordert,gesehen,habe,weiter,lage,eher,können,informiert,wurden,sie,sagen,nie,dort,sehr,ist,genutzt,sieht,wie,stattdessen,vernichtet,aktiv,derzeit,an,ohne,großen,sondern,keinen,danke,vielen,weiteren,https,gibt,alternativ,herunter,laden,funktionierts,direkt,interessante,unserem,veröffentlichen,aktuelle,objektiv,zeitnahe,dar,wichtiges,stellt,via,direkte,neu,aufrufen,folgende,installiert,welchem,oder,einfach,danach,entschieden,trauriger,lassen,massiv,führen,müssen,steht,finde,ans,anfrage,große,erst,worden,seit,ihnen,kann,kommen,seiner,beim,natürlich,bereits,falschen,wirklich,hier,darf,stehen,politische,geben,scheint,damit,geplant,pro,einseitige,viel,deshalb,eigenen,gegen,meist,kaum,alten,tritt,ausgerechnet,erreichen,seine,lebt,dazu,verhindern,gehen,längst,viele,was,fragen,offensichtlich,dafür,wurde,sogar,liegen,hatten,trotzdem,zeigen,solche,da,sollte,erfolgreichen,selbst,tagen,nutzen,kommenden,also,schaut,liefern,begeistern,möglich,teilt,bitte,zielt,darauf,genau,neuen,klar,verpassen,dürfen,desillusioniert,enttäuscht,erschrocken,offenbaren,reißen,absolut,übersteigerten,maximal,nichtigem,kriegen,klein,vollständig,aller,maximale,riesen,bieten,einzigartiges,wendet,weitere,dank,rein,geschützt,gehören,kleine,wo,ihn,eins,waren,bleiben,sanft,erschreckens,nehmen,dich,teilen,schauen,steigen,erhöhen,schützen,fünf,ermöglichen,mitwirken,endlich,verbessern,aber,deswegen,schön,stärkere,nur,sicher,langsam,gestern,freuen,fleißig,eines,war,früher,neues,nichts,erzählen,etwas,plakatieren,offizielle,ganz,speziellen,gab,mal,anderem,danken,herzlich,kleinen,hatte,ausgesucht,sehen,ebenfalls,länger,schon,wenige,einmal,gesagt,genauer,ausgegeben,allen,angesichts,gerne,möchte,wer,jegliche,insbesondere,zerstört,halten,sicherstellen,meiner,gehört,aktuell,mir,oft,diesen,praktisch,erleben,einzusetzen,wichtiger,werde,aufgabe,wichtige,sinnvoll,meinem,tatenlos,bisher,warum,bekämpfen,durchsetzen,ihm,liegt,it,verschiedenen,geboren,präsentieren,sowie,statt,meine,mein,aufnehmen,ganze,weder,hierbei,bis,hin,allein,weniger,suche,besteht,jedoch,senken,ja,stark,dienen,zunehmend,zerstören,während,jeden,getreu,künstliche,etwa,gilt,umso,daher,verloren,mittlerweile,lässt,besonders,neue,jungen,aufgewachsen,of,eigene,lediglich,stehe,tun,bin,beendet,konsequent,wichtig,weil,erhalten,d,will,vernünftiger,gute,trete,gleichzeitig,gegeneinander,unterstütze,aufgrund,gegangen,insgesamt,welcher,bleibt,zweiten,je,stärker,gefährdet,starker,tätig,weg,nämlich,welche,verlieren,zurück,gegeben,kämpfen,ihrem,finden,ihrer,angedachten,oftmals,einiges,alt,gefunden,großer,vertrauen,freue,legen,fit,egal,einzelnen,macht,schaffen,heißt,aktuellen,laut,leisten,teure,entstehen,behalten,seinen,erhalt,aufgestellt,freut,welches,lernen,angehören,erste,günstig,made,beweisen,vergangenen,lesen,später,nächsten,be,youtu,watch,com,youtube,co,fast,per,gründen,sprechen,darüber,überall,ändern,kümmert,bringen,erforderlich,unterstützen,ob,gefragt,wären,beteiligt,daran,gewesen,wäre,wichtigen,fest,würde,falsch,einzige,tut,dabei,sagt,falsche,dies,spricht,größten,kam,drei,musste,wollten,berichten,bald,konnte,aufgenommen,wenig,sozial,erfahren,möglichst,empfehlen,sitzt,kommt,ersten,anderes,gefällt,abschaffen,diesem,anscheinend,verlassen,nachdem,gut,vergangenem,fuer,bedeutet,glauben,außer,alles,eigentlich,gestaltet,laufenden,genug,verfolgt,könnte,denen,wegen,sogenannte,vertreten,gegenüber,seinem,exklusiv,verhindert,sollten,gar,max,paar,bringt,seiten,erläutert,the,rechnen,geworden,eben,folgt,passiert,klare,eigentliche,findet,keines,signal,bislang,nimmt,live,seid,berichtet,anstatt,entsteht,höchste,mindestens,vielfältige,bekommen,geführt,dagegen,betroffen,verteidigt,gesetzt,denken,ebenso,ne,html,tagesschau,bewegen,you,fall,braten,täglich,unterwegs,freundlich,voller,tage,sei,for,bevor,zunächst,beraten,teile,kein,wohl,überhaupt,bauen,schnelle,bestehen,wichtigsten,hierzu,ausrichtet,sofort,arbeiten,hätte,abgelehnt,meint,zudem,jeder,ernst,würden,hinter,zukünftig,solcher,verabschiedet,verschärft,sowohl,holen,hause,beenden,tragen,verantwortungslos,lehnen,könnt,reden,ins,jener,hinaus,überspannt,eindeutig,treten,kritisiert,jede,gehe,all,distanziert,konkret,letzte,versucht,tatsächlich,best,lang,setzen,niemand,zw

ar,wenigen,lange,rund,kurz,hohen,besten,schnell,beginnt,hallo,hoch,knapp,bist,folge,du,wirk
en,tolle,erkennt,vielleicht,lieben,persönlich,bekommt,habt,hilft,gewappnet,beste,beantworten,
darin,groß,lern,unterstützt,besonderen,könnten,mögliche,irgendwann,vier,guten,handelt,kurz
en,erfolgreiche,gekommen,gelungen,beitragen,entlasten,aufwachsen,beantworte,zweite,verä
ndert,dritte,engagieren,besser,schönes,gelingen,diskutieren,schlicht,davon,beispielsweise,vo
rbei,leider,konnten,richtet,echter,bekennen,sogenannten,allerdings,schwere,zuvor,regelmäßi
g,zuge,führt,ehemaligen,stehenden,sichern,meisten,zustand,gesprochen,begründet,einiger,
welchen,damals,lag,stets,zugänglich,klappt,angeblich,bestimmen,einige,werfen,hierfür,wese
ntliche,wächst,innerhalb,schlechter,denkbar,getroffen,erreicht,zumindest,gefährlich,richtig,ko
mplett,erster,obwohl,meinen,attraktiver,plötzlich,entscheiden,vorgelegt,gern,deutliche,hektisc
h,verteilen,gestellt,letztes,schlechtes,freiwilligen,wünschen,ausschließen,tausende,vorgestell
t,spannend,erfolgreich,verdienen,lernt,entscheidend,gefördert,ging,brauchen,enger,ganzen,l
ebenswert,wachsende,voran,treiben,fortsetzen,verlässlicher,verbessert,deine,deinen,lieber,
weit,hart,näher,effektiver,überzeugt,ausbauen,beantragen,zentralen,unterschiedlichen,klare
m,gebaut,einladen,sonst,übrigens,vorstellen,entwickeln,gemeinsamen,diskutiert,kümmern,pe
rsönliche,los,durchgesetzt,umgesetzt,füreinander,entwickelt,verstehen,kennen,aufeinander,e
ntfalten,ziehen,to,hohe,setze,lade,stieg,beschlossenen,öfter,wollt,gelten,offenen,dennoch,inz
wischen,droht,künftig,angemessene,vereinigte,britische,aufgehen,vereinigten,warnt,enden,br
itisches,forderte,unmittelbar,gelangen,anrufen,kostenlos,alarmieren,nächstgelegene,eilen,du
rchzusetzen,erstklassiger,engmaschiges,gewährleistet,besserer,geschaffen,zugestimmt,abdr
ehen,nachfragen,strikt,aufweichen,verbundenes,rausrechnen,gewachsen,verderblicher,kurzf
ristige,zuzumuten,handlungsfähiger,beschreiten,gründet,tiefen,anstreben,ambitionierte,einhe
itliches,falsches,generieren,vermieden,häufig,wertvoller,gesammelten,beteiligten,entstanden
en,ausreichend,starten,offiziell,geeinigt,top,schrecklichen,bündeln,anschließend,formulieren,
begleiten,laufen,beruht,stärkt,beunruhigend,nennenswertes,führenden,fünfzehn,inakzeptabel
,höheren,auszuweiten,derselben,fundamentale,zukünftigen,britischem,eng,abhängen,weitrei
chend,verlässliche,ausgeprägter,unverzichtbar,seien,beruflichen,sammeln,segne,lateinische,
schreiben,besuchen,tausend,großartige,herzlichen,gib,bleibe,brennen,gestalten,smart,hören,
anpacken,verändern,wann,handeln,erreichbar,starke,bezahlen,indem,schlechte,fühlen,besse
re,kostenlosen,runter,teuer,lasst,überlassen,gestiegen,jedes,innen,gerechten,bitten,steigt,ge
zahlt,schreibt,erfüllen,vorbereitet,funktionierendes,gemeinsame,überfällig,zwölf,dringend,sec
hs,vorm,extrem,vollständige,genauso,mittlere,zehn,schlagen,spalten,gerhart,helfen,richtigen,
berät,befindet,übernimmt,erklärt,eingeführt,eröffnet,schafft,zentrale,bereit,bewältigen,ausgeri
chtet,funktionieren,erfolgreiches,gutes,senden,gearbeitet,diesmal,gewinnen,verbindet,erinne
rn,new,ausspielt,suchen,dahin,vorne,folgenden,genauen,bestimmte,geforscht,gedacht,grund
legend,quasi,befasse,vorankommen,irgendwelche,bestimmt,beide,beeindruckende,bestätige
n,eigener,zweifacher,unschlagbare,verbinden,erneuerbare,klaren,regionales,anschauen,guc
kt,cool,beantwortet,abbauen,nehme,persönlichen,einziger,nochmal,ausschließlich,definitiv,b
edrohlich,echten,verkennt,lahmlegt,beweist,starken,verdient,übernehmen,erlebt,wirtschaftlic
h,jung,kennenzulernen,passieren,dir,verpasst,spielen,arbeitet,selbstverständlich,sorgt,klagen
,sichtbar,tschüss,frohes,hast,deiner,standen,deinem,anpassen,erfahre,achtet,eurer,mittelebt,
selbstbewusst,liberal,zurückgenommen,nachholen,heißen,effektiven,technischem,profession
ellen,differenzierten,anspruchsvollen,stattfindet,entspannteste,smarten,schleppen,einpacken
,angeben,berufliche,überreif,exzellent,attraktiv,beides,funktionierende,umgehende,reichlich,v
erschenken,modernere,fällt,nachschauen,preiswert,zuverlässig,bequem,gegängelt,intelligent
,aussieht,gesucht,angespannt,verbindlich,stärke,moderne,wettbewerbsfähig,läden,missen,ec
hte,bestellen,heraus,neugierig,endet,eindämmen,bremst,solide,durchdacht,unzureichend,zu
sammengeschustert,motivierten,fördert,ermöglicht,höheres,beschleunigte,leistungsfähigen,st
ützt,erteilt,schützt,effiziente,umsetzen,geltendes,rumtanzen,erleichtern,sparen,elektronische,
ernstnehmen,zweifeln,überlange,zentraler,umfassender,einzelne,punktuell,zweifel,bündelt,fu
nktionierenden,durchsetzungsfähigen,entgegentreten,versinkt,aufgelistet,vorhaben,vertreibt,
herrschte,damaligen,verstanden,schenkt,offenlegen,konzentrieren,vorn,verkörpert,gesammel
t,blüht,vergeben,gewusst,bestens,freiheitliche,erneuerte,aufzuheben,schnellstmöglich,einig,b
ehutsamer,maßvollem,angestrebt,gefördertem,verbündete,zuverlässigen,begrenzt,triff,zahlre
ichen,entscheidet,unterschaetzt,sichert,frühes,fatales,generell,peinlich,vergessen,ueberrasc

hend,kannst,weiterbilden,überwiegend,unkompliziert,neuster,ausstatten,bedanken,ambitionierten,einschlagen,findest,ausstellen,unterrichtet,weltbeste,auftakt,unabhängig,anlässlich,wiederaufkeimenden,eingefangen,positive,rissen,angefragt,klug,normalen,zack,zick,flexibles,dein,bestimme,schont,wertvolle,verschwenden,jährlich,verbringen,vergeblich,vernünftige,langfristige,sofa,vernünftig,entlastet,überflüssige,schonend,begrenzte,unberührt,angezogener,vorantreiben,bedeutenden,fundierte,wissenschaftlich,hierüber,diskutiere,positioniert,effektive,neuer,gefallen,trifft,sinkt,zusammengestellt,wüten,fahren,entfernt,günstiger,attraktive,geheime,bücher,kürzlich,willst,machst,beginnen,möchtest,klügsten,eingestellt,großes,lohnt,erarbeiten,keiner,zeige,fährt,gerät,zusammenhängen,persönlichkeit,salon,forcieren,vollziehen,offenes,buntes,geförderte,günstige,messbar,umgeht,großartigen,ehrgeiziger,entspannter,vollenden,begegnen,siehst,lebendige,nebenbei,umgraben,stresst,meistern,reinschauen,unterhalten,durchstarten,kombiniert,auszubauen,gelingt,fehlt,weichen,garantieren,kommentaren,fürs,ineinander,zugeschnittenes,speziell,eigenständigen,bestehenden,übersehen,leicht,erwachsene,mitgeplant,mitgedacht,herausragende,aufbauende,bereitstehen,rechtliche,funktioniert,ganzer,verzahnen,eingeschlagen,vorgestellte,chillen,schnack,klingelt,mach,hürden,flächendeckend,schulungen,trainer,kleines,überzeugen,gemütlich,liebsten,verringert,ausgebaut,acht,wahres,vorzuführen,sachlich,entlarven,schritte,automatisch,pädagogische,beschaffen,strecken,geförderten,anzahl,steigern,naher,abbremsen,vereinbaren,flexibilisieren,auszuruhen,personelle,gelegt,gesorgt,ankommt,vorfinden,optimale,führend,übertrifft,draht,direkter,schreib,brauche,unser,jahre,jahr,jahren,sorgen,euch,freien,ihren,ansehen,facebook,freies,sorgen,sozialversicherungspflichtigen,basis,million,und,unsere,die,www,in,de,dr,unserer,unser,themen,schritt,arbeit,seite,jahre,mail,uhr,stadt,andere,ende,online,stellen,c,millionen,sorgen,bekämpfung,unterstüzung,gesetz,wirtschaftliche,mdhb,euch,freien,freie,stärken,digitale,thema,woche,antwort,s,modernen,u,zeit,sache,höhe,griff,chefinnen,fassaden,gepflanzt,ziel,frei,geschichte,ansehen,ende,e,

Appendix D Contents of all parties during the campaigning period

discourse	Influential or shaping				neutral			
category	Issue-related	Party-related	Inviting/ Persuasive	Individuals	Place-related	Time-related	Informational	Miscellaneous
times	15	14	5	14	13	7	7	25
words	climate protection, work, economy, education, cannabis, rent, borders, women, digitalisation, counter-right(#), mobility, jobs, climate, schools, business	afd, cdu, spd, fdp, green, growing-together-city (#CDU), left, fraction; all-city-in-sight(#SPD), red, csu, union, afdnrw, alternativeforyou (#AFD), spdhamburg	to vote, vote, support, voting, thetimeisnow(#Greens)	dietmar bartsch (Left); merkel; teamfegebank (Greens); tschentscher (SPD); kanzlerin; ali; mohamed; amira(Left); mayor; wagnerafd; robert;farle (AFD); fegebank(Greens)	hamburg, germany, city, eu, hamburger, country, berlin, europe, brussels, hamburg's, thuringia, saxony, anhalt	now, time, future, today, february, tomorrow, sunday	bürgerschafts wahl (name of election), euro, election, rank, speech, bürgerschaft (name of legislative government), state list	politics; people; bundestag; federal-government; society; parliament; together; german; issues; democrats; photo; world; half; issue; fight; millions; counts; with each other; source; look; madness; end; debate; democracy
total impressions	30.420.121	51.072.587	11.961.648	27.283.156	54.566.659	31.719.595	19.352.834	51.784.809
total impressions discourse	120.737.512				157.423.896			